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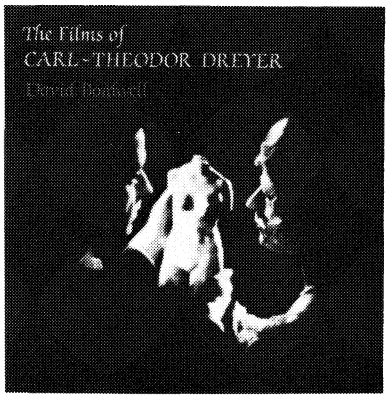

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LET 'EM EAT GUNS

Whatever else might be said about the current administration in Washington, it is indisputable that it is intent on vast armaments expenditures and further nuclear subsidies—which are to be paid for by cutbacks on everything else, notably the institutions which provide technical, economic, or cultural defense for the populace at large. However, it is as yet not clear what role film will play as warfare intensifies between the business elite's government and the people onto whom it is pushing off every possible social cost. The American film industry has never been exactly a major force for the raising of social issues, after all, and it is quite possible that one major reaction will be, as in the great depression of the thirties, the production of more escapist comedies. As we heard in *Sullivan's Travels*, "There's a lot to be said for making people laugh. That's all some people have."

But nothing continues forever, neither the best of times nor the worst. Hindsight identifies certain mysterious points of combustion when new political forces ignite: a woman refuses to sit in the back of a bus, an obscure religious leader returns from exile, students take over a campus building, a boatload of guerrillas lands on a deserted beach. Some believe that such critical events tend to take place just after a cycle of recession or repression has hit bottom, but no one can predict them; we can only say, in our present circumstances, that the slow, massive build-up of pain and despair will sooner or later make itself felt—very possibly in volatile and unanticipated ways. Centralized heavy-finance media like film and TV play very little part in such processes; their major function is as pacifiers, certifiers of the *status quo ante*. Yet there are always documentary makers who cling to the faith that if a sufficient amount of reality can be injected onto the screen, it will have useful effects. Even in recent years such people have given us strong and provocative works: *Harlan County*, *Rosie the Riveter*, *On Company Business*, *Soldier Girls*, *The Last Epidemic*, and many others. Within the feature industry, it is much harder to make contact with social processes through the veil of prefabricated entertainment, yet even there we get an occasional *Norma Rae* or *China Syndrome*. And now *Reds*, an astonishingly sophisticated (for America) amalgam of the personal and political, offers some hope that the industry may be open to new projects which, like the independently produced *Northern Lights*, bring American audiences face to face with their political past and may thus equip them to confront the new eruption of political energy which is bound to come, probably before many more years have passed in this unhappy decade.

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fundamental way, and each time by the power and art of feminine feeling, mystery, and fiction.

Reisz and Pinter must have known that they were running a great risk in setting up such a structure. The very real danger of alienating or even losing the audience was there. To avoid this, the film is organized in such a way that it builds from one integral scene to the next. These, in turn, are connected through an editing strategy which Reisz devised to be both functional and reflective of the subject matter. As one part leaps to the next, Reisz injects some form of visual or aural transition which at first links them. Sometimes, for example, he joins scenes which take place in different centuries by placing them in the same setting or by focusing the camera on objects or details which immediately tell us that we are in this or the past century. At other times, he joins such scenes by overlapping the romantic theme music as we are about to return to the Victorian affair from the present or by overlapping sound effects common to this century (cars, phones) as we are about to enter a scene focusing on the contemporary story. But while this form of transition links the scenes, something about the adjoining parts also tends to clash. Most obviously, there are the instances when the picture jumps from Meryl Streep playing up Sarah's romantic intensity to scenes in which she exhibits Anna in dispassionate or coy moods. Because of this kind of structural mixture, an ironic, perhaps even paradoxical, resonance is eventually created. But this is part of the fun of the movie, and also part of the point both of the book and the adaptation. It teases us to entertain, but also to create the feeling of uncertainty, of the free fall, which the male protagonists must undergo.

At this point it should be emphasized that (like the novel) this film sets out to have a double reaction from us in the end. Reisz and Pinter have tried, first of all, for a presentation which is clear and direct enough so that we might be emotionally involved in the romantic fiction. At the same time, they want the audience, if possible, to undergo something similar to the ambivalent, existential experiences of Charles and Mike. That this must actually have been on their minds is most forcefully revealed by the opening and closing scenes of the picture.

The film begins by showing us a film crew busy setting up a shot against the backdrop of Lyme Bay, the primary setting of Fowles's story. Then a clapper board appears before the camera eye, and suddenly we are thrust into the enactment of a film with the title of the original source. The camera tracks Meryl Streep as she walks toward a serpentine sea wall, the place where she will turn to look at the Charles character in such a way as to unsettle his life forever. What happens to us,

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Editor's Notebook, continued:

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BRUCE AUSTIN teaches at Rochester Institute of Technology; his co-author Mark Nicolich is a statistician, and co-author Thomas Simonet teaches at Rider College. RANDALL CONRAD co-directed *The Dozens*, an independent feature which premiered at the 1980 London Festival. GEORG GASTON teaches at Appalachian State University and has published books on Karel Reisz and Jack Clayton. KATHE GEIST is writing her doctorial dessertation on Wim Wenders. PETER HARCOURT teaches at Carleton University in Ottawa; he wrote *Six European Directors*. BRIAN HENDERSON is the author of *A Critique of Film Theory* and teaches at SUNY Buffalo. KAREN JAEHNE now lives in Washington, DC, but recently returned to Germany to work on a film being produced there. BRUCE KAWIN is the author of *Mindscreen* and teaches at Boulder. Through an editorial gaffe, his signature was left off his review of *The Funhouse* and *The Howling* in our last issue (we *did* get him into the contents listing!). MELANIE WALLACE is a *Cineaste* Associate and is finishing doctoral studies at CUNY.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Cynthia Deno, Journals Manager.

BRIAN HENDERSON

A Musical Comedy of Empire

Several persons associate themselves and comply with certain forms prescribed by law, and the result is something having an identity and existence entirely independent from these persons, and with rights, powers, and duties of its own. All the familiarity in the world with this process does not render the result other than remarkable.[1]

Flying Down to Rio was produced by RKO in 1933 and reflects the policies and complex interactions of the corporations that produced, distributed, and exhibited it. These include RCA, RKO, Rockefeller Center and, indirectly, Pan American Airways.

The Radio Corporation of America was formed in 1919 when the US Navy Department learned that British interests were about to acquire rights in the Alexanderson high-frequency alternator, developed and owned by General Electric. Britain had a virtual monopoly of world cable systems and sought an equal domination of radiotelegraphy and radiotelephony. A letter from Assistant Secretary of the Navy Roosevelt got GE to postpone the action; Admiral Bullard and others later urged it to form an exclusively American company to seek domestic and world primacy in radio communications. GE set up RCA, in which it had a controlling interest, allocating manufacturing to itself and marketing and communications services to RCA, each having full access to the other's wireless patents. In 1921 GE's ownership and control of RCA was shared with Westinghouse in exchange for patent accesses that RCA badly needed. Even the United Fruit Company, which used radio to link its operations in Central America and elsewhere, owned radio stations and patents needed by RCA; through mutual licensing agreements it too became part of "the Radio Group."[2]

Most of RCA's business in the early twenties was international communications—its network of global radiotelegraph services grew quickly. By 1929 it had expanded its operations to include radio broadcasting on a large scale; manufacture of radio equipment, records, and victrolas; founding, owning, and operating NBC; early television research, etc. Under David Sarnoff, RCA's commitment to research was unwavering, even in the worst years of the depression. Sarnoff increasingly became a public spokesman in the twenties and thirties, urging corporate research expenditure as necessary for future expansion and prosperity. He also spoke up for the necessity of international trade for American business recovery and, upon occasion, questioned the doctrine that competition was necessary in all circumstances. "The principle of competition must be interpreted in the light of new methods of production, new forms of organization, modern methods of distribution, and new creative forces which have entered industry."[3] The creative element became decisive in the new equation since science continually rendered obsolete old ways of doing things; the true competition of the new age was "the competition between the old and the new."[4] In 1930 the government instituted antitrust action against RCA; due partly to Sarnoff's skillful negotiating, the 1932 settlement excluded GE and Westinghouse from RCA, which now went public, but left it with its formidable patent pool intact.

1933, the year of *Rio*'s production, was a year of economic crisis and of sharp political dispute concerning what to do about it; the fates of corporations, as well as of individuals, hung in the balance. Within two weeks of his election in 1928, Herbert Hoover had embarked on a goodwill tour of Latin America, visiting eleven countries in fifty days. His administration achieved a major shift in US policy toward Latin America; it fostered peaceful corporate expansionism and disowned the military interventionism of Roosevelt and Wilson. This was also a break with Republican isolationism, prepared in part by Hoover's work as secretary of commerce under Harding and Coolidge, guiding American businessmen into world markets, substantially increasing US trade and investment in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. The problem was to discover, develop, and control various key raw materials throughout the world, as well as

seeking markets for US goods and services. The crash of 1929 and subsequent depression posed a most serious threat to big business internationalism. A reversion to protectionism and isolationism seemed inevitable, but Hoover and corporate interests remained convinced that foreign trade was the way to unload surpluses and therefore the way to recovery, even if we had to lend our customers the dollars to buy our goods.

Roosevelt's campaign had attacked this view. England already bought four times more than it sold to the US—how much more could it or other countries absorb? To the brain trusters the heart of the problem was the anarchy of concentrated economic power; foreign markets could not absorb surpluses from an unbalanced economy at home. Their solution was economic planning led by the federal government.

RKO came about because RCA wanted a film production/exhibition network to market its sound-recording process Phonophone. In 1929 Sarnoff asked Joseph P. Kennedy to organize a new company merging his Film Booking Company of America with the Keith-Orpheum vaudeville circuit, already owned by RCA, to be called Radio-Keith-Orpheum. Kennedy then sold his interest to RCA, which became the principal owner. Like RCA in its realm, RKO's films were to be progressive and sophisticated; the special effects in *King Kong* and *Flying Down to Rio* are an example. Radio City Music Hall, housed with RCA in the new Rockefeller Center, was built in 1932 to showcase RKO films.

RKO made a modest profit in 1929 and 1930; presumably to better this, Sarnoff hired David O. Selznick, fresh from Paramount, to reorganize production. Selznick ran RKO from November 1931 to January 1933, emphasizing the unusual in production and bringing in new people. One of these was Merian C. Cooper, with whom he had worked on *Four Feathers* (1929) and who had attempted to raise money for an independent Selznick studio in 1931, introducing him to his friends Corne-

lius Vanderbuilt Whitney and John Hay Whitney.* Like most studios RKO lost money in 1931 and 1932; when RCA stepped up pressure and interference, Selznick left. Cooper, who had conceived and developed *King Kong*, with Selznick's support, became chief executive in January 1933.†

Early in 1933 Warner Brothers had two large hits with *42nd Street* and *Gold-Diggers of 1933*, both choreographed by Busby Berkeley. This success revived the production of movie musicals after the failures of the early thirties and demonstrated the value of the large production number. The Carioca number, the group tango to "Orchids in the Moonlight" at the Aviators' Ball, and of course the aerial ballet "Flying Down to Rio" are Berkeley-inspired. These numbers are far less precise and controlled than Berkeley's, particularly in framing, editing, and camera movement. They are basically big dance numbers recorded on film, although this permits, sometimes, a sensuality and liveliness not found in Berkeley. The evocative but somewhat brief score (four songs) by the ailing Vincent Youmans was expertly stretched and recycled through the film by Musical Director Max Steiner. *Rio* opened at the Radio City Music Hall on December 29, 1933; it was one of the few RKO films of that year to make a profit.

Cooper not only oversaw the production of *Rio* but no doubt contributed to it in specific ways. Cooper was a journalist, explorer, former war pilot, and documentary film-maker, with a number of business interests, chiefly in movies and aviation. He was a member of the board of directors of Pan American Airways, in which his friend C. V. Whitney was chief investor. Pan Am had achieved air service from Miami to the principal cities of South America in the early thirties and it had a virtual monopoly in this trade. In fact, flying down to Rio was literally impossible except on Pan Am; the film's title and subject matter necessraily evoked Pan Am, indeed were a paean to it. The clipper ships that Sikorsky designed for Pan Am are used in the film.

Juan Trippe, the founder and President of Pan Am, serves as a (displaced) model for Roger Bond and as ideological inspiration for the film. Trippe built his "empire of the air"* through an examplary combination of business daring, diplomatic skill, and state of the art technology. In the twenties he took over innumerable small airlines and dealt with political and economic tangles in each of the countries he dealt with. He built an empire and made a fortune in the middle of a depression and he did it in foreign lands. He was taken as living proof not only of the continued vitality of capitalism but of the Republican credo to develop foreign markets to recover from the depression and put people back to work. Personally Trippe was restlessly creative, always expanding his operations, and adventurous, flying solo over oceans and remote areas to test new routes.

We may say generally that Trippe, the two Whitneys, Cooper, and others were a new kind of capitalist. The great empires had been built by their grandfathers' generation in the age of adventure capitalism. That route was no longer open so these men became adventurers *and* capitalists. They were aviators, explorers, sportsmen, warriors; they also invested in high-risk, high-profit fields such as high- technology enterprises, aviation, and movies. A nostalgia for former, faded eras of wide-open American enterprise is reflected in Trippe's

*In 1935 Selznick International Pictures came to pass with heavy investment by the Whitneys and Cooper on the board of directors. The same year Cooper and C. V. Whitney bought out Technicolor for their new company Pioneer Pictures, which Selznick agreed to head in addition to his own company. See *Memo from David O. Selznick* (New York: Viking, 1972), ed. by Rudy Behlmer, particularly p. xiv, pp. 41-59, 95-134.

†Cooper also lasted only one year before moving on to other things. These included, besides Technicolor, producing twelve films with John Ford under their joint Argosy Films. C. V. Whitney formed a company whose first film was *The Searchers*, coproduced by Whitney and Cooper. Cooper also invested heavily in Cinerama and was in charge of production. Part of RKO's problem was that it let people like Selznick and Cooper go. RKO never made an adequate return for RCA; it is sometimes regarded as the company's only losing subsidiary under Sarnoff. In the late thirties RCA disposed of its interests in RKO. See generally Tim Onosko, "RKO Radio: An Overview," and John Davis, "A Studio Chronology," *The Velvet Light Trap*, No. 10, pp. 2-12. On the production of *Flying Down to Rio*, see Arlene Croce, *The Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers Book* (New York: Outerbridge & Lazard, 1972), pp. 23-29.

*See Matthew Josephson, *Empire of the Air, Juan Trippe and the Struggle for World Airways* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944).

compulsive "Clipper" imagery for all his airplanes. From about 1830 to 1850 American-built clipper ships, faster, lighter, more efficient than others, had dominated international trade in tea and other goods.

Beneath such dreams of glory, or through them, American business interests and their spokesmen saw that foreign markets and materials were essential if capitalism was to survive and that this required US government support and intervention. They believed that the New Deal threatened or impeded these goals in a number of ways.

A brief summary of *Rio* is necessary to our reading. A sign tells us that Roger Bond and his Yankee Clippers are appearing at the Hibiscus Hotel in Miami, Florida. The first sequence shows us Mr. Hammerstein (Franklin Pangborn), later identified as imported from Switzerland to enforce discipline, and Mr. Butterbass (Eric Blore) reviewing the hotel's employees. Arranged in rows like troops, the cooks, bellboys, and maids are admonished and dismissed. The band is next; cut to a dishevelled group of individualists, each dressed differently, sitting, standing, leaning, squatting on the floor, some drunk, some sober. Hammerstein asks for the leader of the group, Roger Bond, and is told by the band's singer, Honey Hale (Ginger Rogers), that he is on his way down; cut to an airplane falling to earth, then landing. Fred Ayres (Fred Astaire) wobbles out while Roger (Gene Raymond) fingers a piano behind his pilot's seat. They race off while, in crosscut, Hammerstein counts down the seconds before the band's radio broadcast. They avoid him by taking another route and arrive just in time, Roger launching into a smooth and expert introduction just at the right moment. Honey sings "Music Makes Me," which the band keeps playing while couples in the audience dance. Many of the women look up at Roger with admiration and he looks down at them with approval. Fred cautions Roger several times: Hammerstein has warned

them not to get familiar with the guests. Roger looks off and sees Belinha De Rezende (Dolores del Rio), who genuinely captivates him. She is sitting with her duenna, Dona Elena, who excuses herself, and a group of American girls, who challenge Belinha to attract Roger if she can. She vamps him with lowered eyelids, fan play and, in general, with her butterfly outfit and Latin exoticism. They dance while Fred signals to a heedless Roger that Hammerstein is coming. Hammerstein notifies Dona Elena, who mistakes Roger for a gigolo and pays him. Roger exchanges the money for an orchid which he presents to Belinha, who gives it to Hammerstein but takes it back when Roger and Dona Elena are not looking. Roger is chagrined and Hammerstein fires the band (offscreen). Next morning Fred announces to a skeptical band that Roger, who has lost them many jobs chasing women, has booked them at the Hotel Atlantico in Rio de Janeiro. Paychecks are distributed.

In the next scene Roger and Belinha meet accidentally while sending RCA Radiograms to Rio, each mentioning Julio, Belinha's fiancé, who has arranged the booking for his friend Roger. Each also mentions the Hotel Atlantico, which is owned by Belinha's father, Carlos De Rezende. It is arranged that "a friend of Roger's" (= Roger himself) will fly Belinha to Rio to see her father, who is ill; but there is no room for Dona Elena in the small airplane. In disguise to fool Donna Elena at take-off, Roger reveals himself in flight to Belinha. They are grounded on a tropical island due to mechanical difficulty, which Roger later exaggerates to prolong the idyll. He composes a song on his flying piano, "Orchids in the Moonlight," to romance her. Through superimposition, the film splits each of the lovers into two persons, one uninhibited and in love, the other bound by convention. The two sets of lovers merge as they kiss, at which point Belinha explains with alarm that she is committed to a marriage arranged by her family. Roger calls this mediaeval and vows to make radical changes in her country; the Army, the Navy, and all of South America cannot stop him.

In the morning some apparently naked black savages turn out to be bellhops and caddies and the tropical island a golf course in Port au Prince, Haiti. Belinha catches the regular airplane to Rio, despite Roger's protests. A montage of postcard views of Rio suggest an aerial approach to the city, but do not ground it in any character's point of view.

In the next scene, at the Hotel Rio, Roger tells Julio about the girl on the island, with whom he is in love but whose name he does not know. By careful questioning Julio determines that the woman is Belinha and that they did not consummate their idyll. Julio calls Belinha, who lies to avoid seeing him that night. They will meet at the Aviator's Club Ball the next night, to which Julio also invites Roger and Fred, presumably to settle the matter in his favor. That night Roger goes in search of Belinha while Fred, Honey, and the rest of the band (and the film) go to hear the Turunas, a Rio band, at the Club Carioca. They are confident in their own success when the Turunas appear lazy and indifferent, then very unconfident as the band works up to "The Carioca," a vast Latin production number. Fred and Honey study the various torrid steps and wittily parody them in a stylized way, themselves participating in the number.

The "next morning" sequence begins with a shot of the Hotel Atlantico, tall and elegant, overlooking Rio Bay. Three men dressed formally—like gangsters of the *Scarface* era—converse with a man in British dress (bowler, gloves, cane). They are identified as Greeks from a Monte Carlo gambling syndicate who wish to take over the Hotel Atlantico. Alfredo Vianna, Carlos De Rezende's banker, wishes them to succeed. They will arrange the refusal of a gambling permit to the hotel, causing De Rezende to default.

Meanwhile, Roger is still searching for Belinha; but again the film follows Honey and Fred, who finds Belinha and Dona Elena in a fashionable café and gets himself thrown out for intruding on them. At the Aviator's Ball that evening, Julio wins back a distracted Belinha by singing "Orchids in the Moonlight" as rear-view projections recall her night on the island with Roger. Roger arrives and learns the truth; when Belinha excuses herself, he declares to Julio his intention to persist and poses a friendly competition between them: let's let nature takes its course (not common sense, as Julio suggests) and let the woman decide.

Another scene with the Greeks and the banker reveals that they have succeeded in preventing an entertainment permit for the

hotel opening. And indeed the band's rehearsal and Fred's rehearsal of an odd assortment of would-be chorus girls is broken up by police. Belinha's father confirms that there will be no opening. Roger looks at an airplane in the sky and gets the idea for an aerial ballet as a way to overcome the ban. Julio and the Yankee Clippers and the chorus girls participate in the ballet, which is a great success and saves the day both for De Rezende and the Clippers, who now have secure jobs, and explicitly defeats the banker and the Greeks. Letting Julio lead the airplanes in the ballet, Roger leaves for Buenos Aires. Julio elopes with Belinha on the same airplane. He calls for the pilot to marry them but at the last substitutes Roger for himself and bails out.

In *Mythologies* Roland Barthes defined the ideology of a text as the signified of its connotation. In *S/Z* he propounded a more complex model; he divides the classical fiction into five principal codes and he breaks down the distinction between denotation and connotation.

> Connotation is the way into the polysemy of the classic text, to that limited plural on which the classic text is based . . . (A) connotation . . . is a determination, a relation, an anaphora, a feature which has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior, or exterior mentions, to other sites of the text (or of another text) . . . (C)onnotation is a correlation immanent in the text, in the texts; or again, one may say that it is an association made by the text-as-subject within its own system . . . Analytically, connotation is determined by two spaces: a sequential space, a series of orders, a space subject to the successivity of sentences, in which meaning proliferates by layering; and an agglomerative space, certain areas of the text correlating other meanings outside the material text and, with them, forming "nebulae" of signifieds.[5]

The sequential space, a series of orders, a space subject to the successivity of shots, in which meaning proliferates by layering corresponds to what Barthes calls the proairetic code ("the coordination of the actions represented") and the hermeneutic code ("the revelation of truth"). These two codes "impose their terms according to an irreversible order," which constitutes "a logico-temporal order." The other three codes—the semic code, the cultural codes, the symbolic code—"establish

permutable, reversible connections, outside the constraint of time."[6]

Correspondingly, we will divide our analysis of ideology formation in *Rio* (roughly) according to its sequential and non-sequential aspects. First we will examine some of its sequential significations, corresponding in general to the plot summary above, and then some of its non-sequential ones. Due to faults in our analysis or complexities of the text it has not always been possible to keep these discussions separate or even, in some cases, distinct.

Some of Barthes's other definitions of connotation are worth reviewing before we begin, particularly the manner in which he poses the question of ideology.

> Topologically, connotation makes possible a (limited) dissemination of meanings, spread like gold dust on the apparent surface of the text (meaning is golden). Semiologically, each connotation is the starting point of a code (which will never be reconstituted), the articulation of a voice which is woven into the text . . . Functionally, connotation, releasing the double meaning on principle, corrupts the purity of communication: it is a deliberate "static," painstakingly elaborated, introduced into the fictive dialogue between author and reader, in short, a countercommunication . . . Structurally, the existence of two supposedly different systems—denotation and connotation—enables the text to operate like a game, each system referring to the other according to the requirements of a certain *illusion*. Ideologically, finally, this game has the advantage of affording the classic text a certain *innocence:* of the two systems, denotative and connotative, one turns back on itself and indicates its own existence: the system of denotation; denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature . . .[7]

Barthes uses "ideology" to refer to the text's masking and disguising its own operations, including of course its productions of ideology in the more usual senses. This cautions us to trace not only what *Rio* signifies at various points but also its textual operations in doing so, including suppressed or distorted other significations.

Propp's analysis of narrative posits an initial loss or lack that the hero liquidates after overcoming a number of obstacles, including defeat of the villain who has caused the loss, often with the unknowing complicity of the hero. In many narratives the hero lacks a wife in addition to whatever else he seeks and his adventures bring him a wife as well as the object he seeks, thus liquidating both lacks at once. Propp's scheme, refined by later narratologists like A. J. Greimas, provides an important organizing principle of the sequential order of classical narrative specified by Barthes.

Flying Down to Rio poses two lacks, the band's lack of jobs and Roger's lack of a wife. We will explore the sequential order of the film through these narrative axes, which of course depend upon and organize its logico-temporal order. We will consider first the jobs chain and then the Belinha chain and then the various ways in which they interrelate.

In the loss of the band's jobs the villain is Hammerstein, who is hostile to its members from the start. But it is only with Roger's complicity that he is able to carry out his villainy, that is, to fire the band. Roger escapes one Hammerstein interdiction by arriving at the bandstand on time but violates another by dancing with Belinha, a hotel guest. The lobby scene the next morning with the band members out of a job, with no place to go, and broke has a distinct iconic value: men (and one woman) out of work, not knowing what to do or where to turn. As Honey says, speaking the question of the audience regarding the film itself, "I wonder where we go from here." Fred enters with the news that Roger has found them a job in Rio. The band is skeptical, they anticipate a greater disaster so far from home. It will take the rest of the film and the overcoming of many obstacles to secure the Rio jobs, but the Rio booking is ultimately the liquidation of the loss of jobs.

In that Roger has lost them many jobs "from Maine to Miami" by chasing women, the Rio jobs liquidate a larger lack than Hammerstein's firing, in that they also involve liquidation of the other lack, Roger's lack of a wife. An obstacle to the Rio solution is the band's skepticism that it will work, due primarily to its distrust of Roger, and generally its defeatism and pessimism about the future and even about the value of their own work. (In another sense, this is itself an important lack to be liquidated by the narrative.) When they hear the Turunas, the foreign competition: "This stuff is swell, but we can't do it." "It's going to

be a long walk home." Presumably the great success of the hotel opening and the long run that is sure to follow restore their self-confidence and their optimism about the future, as well as their faith in Roger.

The solution to the lack of jobs involves resort to foreign markets. The commonplace of Propp's fairy tales—transfer of the lost object to a foreign land—here acquires a specific, economic meaning. The band gets the jobs it lost, and presumably better, more secure ones. Thus this narrative axis of the film realizes a prime tenet of the Hooverian position—solve domestic unemployment and depression by developing foreign markets through free international trade, encouraged by government action. It is interesting that Roger is identified by a female admirer as a son of Wall Street: "His father owns the sunny side of Wall Street." This and his aviation and other qualities identify Roger rather closely with Juan Trippe. More importantly, the film seems thereby to criticize Wall Street (capitalism): its irresponsibility, its unchecked adventuring, and its selfishness (lack of concern for people) led to the depression and unemployment. However, this is no more than the inoculation principle: admit part of the poison in order to expel it the more completely. The poison here is the socialist, or even the New Deal, critique of unchecked capitalism. Admitting part of the critique disarms it more effectively than denial, which in any case was no longer possible in 1933. Besides, what Wall Street takes away, Wall Street can also restore. Roger redeems himself (and the system) by his triumph in Rio and also by his settling down with wife there, which might be read as long-range, long-term imperialism rather than merely a quick recovery from the depression.

Of course this narrative argument distorts the benefits of "free international trade" and even those of the actual imperialist relationship of the US to Brazil (or South America) that it does not present. The idea that overseas markets could absorb much more US surpluses in 1933 is disingenuous. The film advances this point not only through its narrative logic but through its symbolic formations, particularly its excited *discovery* of Brazil—its music, its dance, its sex, its orchids and butterflies—through aviation, radio, trade, cinema. The pose of the discourse is that there has been no American involvement before, a patent untruth, therefore that the market is wide open. It is true that technological developments such as radio and aviation make new imperialist development possible, and the film celebrates this. What is untrue is that this will improve the economic condition of American workers, represented by the band members in the film. But ideology often works by posing displaced, alternate, and even contradictory formulations; in celebrating a new empire that will solve present economic problems, the film also justifies the empire that is already there, defending it against expected New Deal curbs, protectionism, and other attacks.

What is the film's model of international trade? The Turunas band leader at the Club Carioca describes his group's successful tour of North America; by film's end the Yankee Clippers have a secure run at the Hotel Atlantico. International trade is simple exchange; with it goes a simplified notion of specialization of production and differentiation of products. The Clippers despair because they cannot do the Carioca; they finally succeed by doing their own music just as the Turunas succeeded with their music in North America. From this simple exchange are to come jobs for American workers. This model distorts the imperialist relation, which depends upon unequal economic development and unequal military power. Far more usual than an exchange of finished products is a flow of raw materials to the dominant country and of finished products to the dominated one, both at prices favorable to the dominant country. André Gunder Frank, writing specifically of Chile and Brazil, speaks of long-term "metropolis-satellite" relations between countries.[8] Capitalism creates underdevelopment in its imperialized states and keeps them underdeveloped as long as possible because it is in its economic interest to do so. They are an integral part of its world system.

The principal obstacle to Roger's overcoming the band's lack of jobs is the intrigue between the Greek syndicate and the banker to take over the hotel from Belinha's father. If the hotel does not open, the band has no jobs. This may be read as an analogue of imperialist competition. The banker is named Alfredo Vianna and is treated by the other Brazilians as a fellow South American; but his dress, accent, and careful diction identify him unmistakably as British and he is played by an English actor, Reginald Barlow. As far as I

have been able to determine, Greece and Greek interests had a negligible role in Brazil in the nineteen-thirties, or at any time. The major imperialist competitors of the United States in Brazil and Latin America generally were (in order of importance) Germany, Great Britain, Italy, France, Japan.[9] Great Britain had the oldest investments and trade relations with Brazil. Germany made a concerted effort to establish trade relations and political influence in Brazil in the years before Hitler came to power and even more intensively afterwards. Both were threatened by vigorous US efforts in Brazil in the later twenties and early thirties. There is even evidence that Germany and Great Britain formed a de facto alliance of trade interests against US intrusion for a short period in the early thirties. It is arguable that the British-seeming South American banker stands in for Great Britain and the Greeks for Germany. The pairing of Hammerstein, a militaristic and regimenting Swiss, a rather clear displacement of Germany, with Mr. Butterbass, an Englishman, in the early part of the film gives support to this reading.

Why the subterfuge? RCA's (and Pan Am's) actual international entanglements and competitive/cooperative arrangements with England and Germany might be a factor, as might US foreign policy, overt or covert. In general, Hollywood treatment of other countries and peoples has been determined by the foreign markets for American films. These were ever-increasing in the twenties and thirties and became a more and more integral part of the film industry's financial structure. Germany and Great Britain were very large markets for American films; Greece was not, due to its size and relative lack of movie theaters.

Hammerstein and Butterbass on the one hand and the Greeks and the banker on the other are parallel pairs in more than the signification of nations. Their functions in the plot are so similar that the actions of the later pair seem a continuation of the actions of the earlier pair. The first pair fires the band; the second pair intrigues to lose them their Rio jobs or to prevent their ever beginning. Thus the Greeks and the banker are really villains, Hammerstein and Butterbass in new form in another land, rather than obstacles. The difference is that they must be defeated, as they are, not merely overcome.

The way that Roger defeats them is to circumvent the lack of an entertainment license by staging an aerial ballet; that is, by technology. Propp calls a *helper* whatever aids the hero in performing his tasks and the film presents American technology as the biggest and best helper that anyone ever had. Radio secures the booking in Rio, airplanes get the band down there then help save the day in the aerial circus. Technology defeats foreign competition (and local tangles also); it is America's decisive edge in international trade. Even if there is some truth in this in some economic sectors in 1933, the film makes it an absolute law, the result of a natural affinity between Americans and technology. America's advanced technology is itself an argument for international trade, since its success is inevitable. The need for research to keep that advantage, a recurring theme of Sarnoff's statements, is an argument for tax benefits, for the suppression of antitrust actions, for government subsidies in some cases perhaps, etc. (Pan Am, which was built by US mail subsidies, could make analogous arguments about "national interest" along defense as well as communications lines. As we've seen, the defense potential of RCA was understood from its beginnings.)

The hero's lack of a wife need not be established in Propp by any villainy or disclosed to the hero by any agent nor need he be dispatched on his quest. Often the hero sets out on another quest not knowing that he needs or that he will find a wife. Roger's womanizing has cost the band jobs, an "extra" reason for him to find a wife. (This is not character motivation but textual reason.)

Hammerstein may be more obstacle than villain in the Belinha chain. He calls Dona Elena and otherwise does his best to keep them apart, but he also functions as a helper to the romance by firing the band thus sending it, in effect, to Rio. The jobs chain and the Belinha chain dovetail in the Rio sequence: in saving the band's jobs, Roger must also save the hotel (and vice versa). Saving the hotel helps overcome Belinha's resistance and presumably that of her father; it also helps induce Julio to withdraw in Roger's favor. In this the Greeks and the banker may function as villains in the Belinha chain but with so many other resistances and factors in operation their effect seems diluted.

On the tropical island Roger poses marriage to Belinha with scarcely any plot preparation.

There is a formidable textual rhetoric to carry the viewer through this abruptness. An exaggerated romantic setting, a big romantic song "Orchids in the Moonlight," the splitting of the lovers so that we can hear their secret thoughts—these are designed to make up for the scenes usually needed to make characters fall in love. Moreover, this sequence must be vivid enough to motivate the lovers and to convince the viewer of their passion through the complications that will keep them apart until the end. This is a classical strategy of romantic comedy, which is done more easily in a musical: "Orchids" is played three more times in the diegesis, once with rear-projected images of the idyll, and several additional times on the sound track. This serves to remind the characters and us of the island scene.

Roger's surprising line reveals his lack and his quest: marriage; but it reveals something about the film as well. Hoover's policy toward Latin America posed a marriage between North and South America—not rape, prostitution, corruption, or seduction. Of course this is imperialism carried on by other means, and more effective ones; Teddy Roosevelt's charges and threats were counter-productive in the long run. Thus there is considerable respect for South Americans and their culture shown by the film and by its characters. Politeness and respect characterize the relations of Roger to Belinha, her father, and Julio, and theirs to him; whereas Fred plays the buffoon by stumbling over social rules and distances. Many shots show Americans looking with interest at Brazilian dancing, singing, band playing, apparently learning from it and, in the case of Fred and Honey, imitating it. So the Brazilians watch them dance, and later listen to Fred sing, with interest.

All things being equal, respect for other cultures is better than disrespect or indifference; but things are never equal. For Lévi-Strauss, intermarriage laws are always a function of exchange and alliance between two tribes. So "respect for other cultures" has many faces and serves many purposes and often changes precipitately from one historical period to another and from one country to another.

We turn to the non-sequential aspects of *Rio*. Here we pose that "agglomerative" space that Barthes speaks of, "certain areas of the text correlating other meanings outside the material text and, with them, forming 'nebulae' of signifieds." These are the text's "permutable, reversible connections, outside the constraint of time."

It is the argument of the entire film that the United States, by virtue of geography and cultural affinity, has a "natural" relationship to South America. The European countries have no such relationship; indeed their interest in the region may be "unnatural." There is emphasis throughout on friendship between North and South America: Roger and Julio are best friends; the marriage of Roger and Belinha, arranged by Julio, will marry the two continents. The Turunas band leader refers to our "sister continent" North American and the "Hotel Atlantico," which functions in the film as the House of Brazil disputed by the major powers, refers to that ocean shared by North and South America and in which they are one. Other powers share that ocean also but the US has only to fly down to Rio, not across to it.

Another symbolic field contrasts European scheming and intrigue with American openness and directness. The intrigue of the Greeks and the South American banker suggests at one level the difficulties of doing business in South America; Juan Trippe cut through, or worked around, many local situations like this. At the same time it suggests one pattern of imperialist activity: working through local allies, exploiting local rivalries to one's own benefit. It functions also as imperialist scheming generally. America is shown to be outside of such competition and against it; it will triumph by refusing to scheme. Like Roger, America succeeds abroad by its dash and imagination, by its fresh, original solutions to problems, and by its superior technology. To refuse to engage in imperialist scheming yet to win through intrinsic qualities is a myth on both counts. It is the international counterpart of the repudiation of politics in Capra and Ford films. Young Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Smith are idealized figures who avoid politics (scheming, compromise) yet succeed as political leaders.

Another symbolic field associates Europe with regimentation and "planning" and America with free individualism and spontaneity. Hammerstein lines up cooks, bellboys, and maids in military rows and inspects them; he seeks to plan human relationships by fore-

closing contact between guests and employees. So the Greeks and the banker seek to arrange the hotel's failure in advance and to exclude the Yankee Clippers before they perform. In the first case, a spontaneous attraction disrupts the scheme; in the second imagination, enthusiasm and enterprise overcome it.

Roger is the site of a number of Barthesian "semes" of this kind. He never plans, never worries, takes no apparent heed of deadlines, does not know what he will do next. He says of Fred, "He takes his work too seriously," which he himself never does. But Roger always gets the job done; he arrives at the microphone just in time to deliver an expert, cheerful, offhand introduction. Hammerstein calls Roger a loafer, which shows that Europeans misunderstand the American style. Individualistic ways of doing things and a lack of planning do not mean inefficiency and incompetence.

Roger's mastery of technology and media give him a competitive edge. He can fly an airplane one minute and do a radio broadcast or write a song the next. Roger suggests the creativity of American capitalism, continually inventing new solutions to new problems, and of the new capitalist, who combines business, diplomatic, technologic, even artistic skills, in adapting to new opportunities. Roger is a one-man conglomerate, suggesting the diversity of the new corporation (such as RCA). If he is allowed the full scope of his talents and instincts, all will benefit. Hammerstein's regimentation is also "economic planning," which the film presents as pure repression. To it the film poses Roger's spontaneity, his ability to change the locale and nature of his operations, etc., images of a free market economy that the monopolistic tendency of large US corporations (RCA, Pan Am) belies. Vindicating Roger's spontaneity and instincts is the film's vindication of capitalism but this involves distortion. The issue was never planning vs. a free market but *who* was going to plan and control market conditions and sources of raw materials, monopolistic private enterprise or the federal government.

Roger is drawn from an earlier tradition of American heroes; perhaps he must be in order to carry the ideological burden of the film. Roger is the free, laughing, spontaneous, athletic, and optimistic American portrayed in many films by Douglas Fairbanks: *His Majesty, the American.* This figure embodied the confidence of American economic and political power before and after World War I. One does not see him much after *Rio*; the depression brought wary, beleaguered, and beaten down heroes. Even at the time of *Rio* the figure is rare, suggesting a conscious or unconscious reaching back for the icon of an earlier, more attractive epoch. This is less an indulgence in nostalgia than a use of it to bear upon and influence present issues.

Another symbolic field is the figure of Brazil as (imperialist) object of desire. Brazil is seen from the air and the ground, it is figured in music, dance, song, decor, costume, etc. Two recurring motifs are the orchid and the butterfly. Some of these semes flow toward Belinha, who is sometimes a displacement of the desire for Brazil, sometimes its embodiment. She is dressed as a butterfly when Roger first sees her; a large butterfly is also painted on the floor of the Club Carioca; later we see American tourists with butterfly nets. Orchid imagery is more extensive. Roger gives Belinha an orchid (with the money Dona Elena pays him for his "sexual services"), which she gives to Hammerstein (apparently to appease Dona Elena), but then silently takes back when no one is looking. Despite Hammerstein's interference, a contract has been sealed. Dona Elena has already identified Belinha as a flower, as the film will again and again. Successful delivery of an orchid from Roger to Belinha implies delivery of Belinha (flower) to Roger later. On the island Roger's other self says that Belinha looks like an orchid. He composes "Orchid*s* in the Moonlight": the one that she wears and the one that she is. He tells Julio: "She's like a flower, a rose. What am I talking about? She's an orchid, a *white* orchid." (We have not space here to develop the extensive symbolic field of race in the film.)

The figure of Brazil as object of desire is not limited to Belinha. When Roger is dancing with Belinha, a jealous blonde asks, "What have these South Americans got below the equator that we haven't?" This is the imperialist question in sexual form and the sexual question in imperialist form. Roger, and the film, will fly down and find out. The line turns the body of a woman into a map, with the waist as equator, with known and unknown regions to be explored. It also turns the map into the body of a woman. South America is the un-

known, the other, the dark continent that the imperialist desires as a sexual object. He wishes, after defeating all rivals, to possess it, to ravish it. The line eroticizes the globe, which the imperialist does also. ("O my America! My new found land," says Donne to his mistress.) The Monroe doctrine insists upon the unity of the sexual body; activities above and below the equator must be coordinated. (There can be no diddling by foreign powers.) It situates itself, as it were, at the navel, as the jealous guardian of below and above. (The question of the imperialist imaginary has not been posed by analysis.)

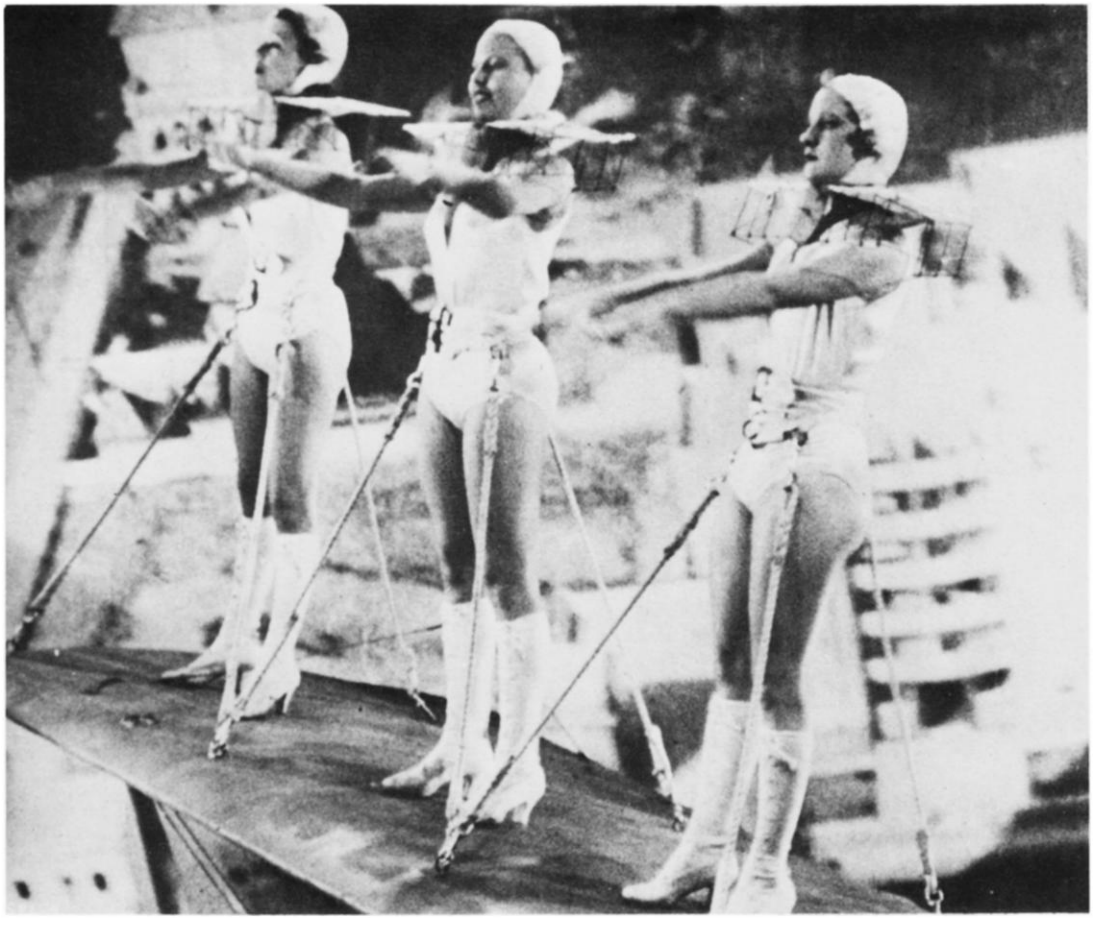
Images of radio and aviation abound in the film; technology becomes itself a kind of body. This begins with the RKO logo itself, "A Radio Picture." A radio tower stands bestride the globe beeping expanding circles of radiotelegraphy beyond the edges of the frame. This is followed by a single-engine airplane flying toward the viewer, the first credit card mounted on its propeller. Each of the credit cards has a compass and airplanes flying south. The title song, which is played over the credits but whose words we hear only at the end, provides a manual for taking a trip to Rio.

Send a radio to Rio de Janeiro
With a big hallo just so they'll know
and stand by there;
We'll fly there
Hey Rio
Everything will be o-kay
We're singing and winging our way to you

Barthes says that we may treat the text like a mother and caress it lovingly or like a father and attack it. So with airplanes and the third world in *Rio* and in *King Kong*. In *Rio* the airplanes are used for peace, for travel, for exchange, for erotic gratification.

You'll love it
Soaring high above it
Looking down on Rio from a
Heaven of blue

Hey, feller, twirl that old propeller
Got to get to Rio and we've got to make
time.



They caress the land, they are used for music, dance, song, and romance.

In *King Kong* the destructive side of aviation is demonstrated. Despite the film's last line, it *is* the airplanes with machine guns that kill the beast. Both films constitute an argument for air power, for commerce and discovery, on the one hand, and for warfare on the other. If the overdetermined Kong is also the exploited third world rising up in revenge, then the two films together show the double importance of air power for imperialist activities: reconnaissance/exchange and attack/conquest. In any case, as many commentators have pointed out, the consequence of intensified imperialist competition is war; they are parts of a single system.

The course of empires always reflects political developments in the home country, while requiring manipulation of home politics in order to sustain and extend themselves. Not stressed but constantly at work in *Rio* is a radical opposition between Roger on the one hand and the band and other workers on the other. The band members are shown as timid, conformist, fearful of the future, unable to see beyond present economic disaster, lacking confidence in themselves and their work. They will never understand Roger and his ways but the best they can do for themselves is to follow him with a blind faith. Roger follows his instincts, takes risks, yields to sudden visions and enthusiasms—the film's version of creative corporate capitalism. Thus a thorough-going elitism regarding American society underlies the film's vision of empire. There is an unspeakable difference between men, their talents, their scope of operations, and their property, seen here like Roger's airplane/piano, as necessary to exercise their talents, hence as justified.

International corporate structures and plans for future development, technological and imperialist, were not to be impeded by democratic processes. The huge corporations had their own sense of public good, in which the public was to have no say. For a short time (1933 to ?) American corporations were afraid that the New Deal, riding a popular groundswell, would curb their operations at home and abroad. Effective counteraction of many different kinds helped to minimize this threat.

A POSTSCRIPT ON "NEW COMEDY"

Greek Comedy is commonly divided into three periods: Old, Middle, and New. Dramatic form was very free in the early period, centering on some sort of procession (*komos*, hence the word comedy) of chorus and actors to the accompaniment of biting verse. Around this were grouped dramatic episodes as well as the agon, an interchange between actors or semi-choruses. The plays of Aristophanes, the only surviving texts of this period, use this format to make sharp criticisms of the social and political life of Athens.

> The Middle Comedy probably coincided with a decrease in the importance of the chorus and an increasing concentration on the dramatic actor. As political and private polemics receded into the background, the actor became less of a caricature, until with New Comedy he preserved no more than a slight twist of kindly irony.[10]

New Comedy centers on ordinary city life, as in the plays of Menander (342-291), its principal representative. Only two of his plays and several fragments survive, but it was New Comedy that was in fashion when Rome came into contact with the Greek way of life. Thus, Cesare Molinari argues, it became the prototype of comedy in the theatre of the Western World.

The formula of New Comedy has been described by Northrop Frye.

> New Comedy unfolds from what may be described as a comic Oedipus situation. Its main theme is the successful effort of a young man to outwit an opponent and possess the girl of his choice.[11]

> The plot structure of Greek New Comedy, as transmitted by Plautus and Terrence, in itself less a form than a formula, has become the basis for most comedy, especially in its more highly conventionalized dramatic form, down to our own day . . . What normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will. In this simple pattern there are several complex elements. In the first place, the movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another. At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero, and the moment

> when this crystallization occurs is the point of resolution in the action, the comic discovery . . .[12]

Molinari too emphasizes the sameness of New Comedy. He speculates that the public "was never over-enthusiastic about comedy."

> On the other hand, it never got bored. The recipe was always the same—a love-story complicated by the use of disguises, mistaken identities, recognition scenes, and servants adroitly outwitting old men and pimps and spinning a web of intrigue to further their masters' interests. Yet it always seemed different. This was why, both as a literary genre and from the point of view of its stage-performance, comedy never really changed throughout the whole, long course of Roman history.[13]

Frye extends the point. "The conventions of New Comedy are the conventions of Jonson and Molière, and a fortiori of the English Restoration and the French rococo." Even Ibsen uses them regularly. And: "The average movie of today is a rigidly conventionalized New Comedy . . .[14]

Servants, pimps, and courtesans drop out of latter-day New Comedy, at least its cinematic versions. So also does conscious intrigue: film heroes and heroines usually react to circumstances, as they do to each other, rather than attempt to manipulate them, as Congreve's characters, for example, do constantly. If a character has designs, like Susan Vance in *Bringing Up Baby,* she tends to make it up as she goes along, adapting circumstances to her purpose. Or like Irene Dunne in *The Awful Truth,* who is delighted to have disrupted her husband's love affair (by answering his telephone) but did not intend to do so.

Roger Bond is nothing if not the young man who seeks the woman of his choice against strong oppositions of many kinds, only at the last overcoming all and marrying her. The young men in Roman comedy were callow and rather tame; they were still sons within the family. Roger resembles more the mature, self-reliant man of the world of Shakespeare, Congreve, etc. So Belinha, the young woman who is sought: she is still attached to her family, but her flirtatiousness, her discriminating susceptibility to romance, and her pleasure at baiting Roger place her with later comedy also. Belinha's father (Brazil's power structure) is presented as ill, unable to overcome his internal and external opponents, and otherwise not very assertive. It is only with Roger's help that he is able to hold on to his hotel (land, prosperity). Resistance to Roger is provided by Julio. "The opponent to the hero's wishes, when not the father, is generally someone who partakes of the father's closer relation to established society: that is, a rival with less youth and more money."[15]

Opposition to Roger is provided also by Belinha's aunt and constant companion, Dona Elena, the closest the film comes to a *purely* stock character, as her name suggests.* She serves as the institutional barrier, keeping the young man from the young woman, throwing his messenger out on the street, etc. When Roger does meet and dance with Belinha in Miami, she quickly dispatches him and insults him. In Roman comedy these are the functions of the *senex* or old man, usually the father or guardian of the young woman. But the *senex* usually has financial or other base motives—sometimes he pursues the young woman himself—of which Dona Elena is innocent. She functions as pure propriety, i.e., as pure repression. We have seen her in many plays and films, among them *The Pirate* [1942; 1948], set in the West Indies in the early 19th century. There, as in *Rio,* the problem for the drama is to get the young woman away from the duenna so that she can meet the young man then to reimpose her control for a new round of struggles. The dramatic strategy is to open things up (a bit) in order for contact to be made; then to close them again in order to recreate the difficulties of contact. What is surprising is that this figure in black lace and tiara, so right for period works, turns up unreconstituted in a 1933 film. Perhaps this archaism coincides with Roger's references to the 18th century and the need for a "revolution" in Brazil and thus reinforces the film's imperialist perspective.

One may not ask, What is the ideology of New Comedy? since that form spans over two

* What is this character's name, anyway? Arlene Croce lists it as Titia, several other sources and guidebooks as Dona Elena. They may however, take this from a remark of Roger's: "She (Belinha) was travelling with one of those Dona Elenas." Dona Elena in any case sounds like duenna, "the elderly woman who has charge of young unmarried women in a Spanish or Portuguese family." The credits call her Dona Elena; Belinha calls her Titia, which means "aunt" in Portuguese.

thousand years and several social formations. But the decision to use the New Comedy format in any particular case and its popularity over long periods of time may be analyzed ideologically. In this the relation of the form to social formation at earlier periods may provide perspectives of interest.

Molinari correlates the chorus in early comedy with political comment and dispute and the rise of the individual actor or figure in New Comedy with the receding of the chorus and with it politics. G. S. Gordon makes a different but related point.

> This Athens of Theophrastus was no longer the seat of an empire; it was soon to be little more than a municipality with a past, famous for its buildings, its statues, its Greek, and its schools. Its citizens took to minding their private concerns and considering the vanity of human wishes. Denied the exhilarating study of national questions, they fell back on the narrower study of their neighbors. Denied the macrocosm, they turned instead to the microcosm of municipal man. To instruct and amuse this municipal society Theophrastus invented the Character, and Menander, his pupil in philosophy, perfected the Comedy of Manners. It is a significant conjunction, not peculiar to Athens. You will find that whenever Characters are written there is this same conjunction, of Character-writing and Comedy: to every Theophrastus his Menander. . . .
>
> For the moment let us rest in the certainty that they are contemporaries and express the same instinct. They are both the voice of a society to which nothing is so interesting as the spectacle of itself.[16]

But two large empires, the Roman and the American, showed a decided preference for New Comedy, over long periods of time, with endless variations, precisely during their periods of dominance. Of course it can be politically useful to keep political issues off the stage and, even better, to keep the minds of citizens away from politics—particularly the conflicts, wars, ups and downs of empire—through endless diversion, distraction, entertainment. This is ideology in a sense but it may also be understood as direct political action on the populace. It is ideology in that it advances a view of the world in which private issues are paramount; but it is political action in that it effectively excludes critical, oppositional potentialities from social life and from individuals. Indeed the stupefying repetitions of popular movies and television become physiological in their effects on viewers. Quantitative change becomes qualitative change: narcosis rather than the acceptance of a world-view is the result.

At the same time, *Rio*'s plugging of Pan-American trips to Rio and Buenos Aires and its up-to-date aircraft and of RCA Radiograms ("Send a Radio to Rio de Janeiro") are less ideology than direct marketing activities. They promote not a world-view but specific services and insofar as these are "packaged" as a world-view, it is the sale that is primary and the advancing of the world-view instrumental.

NOTES

1. Robert L. Raymond, "The Genesis of the Corporation," 19 *Harv. L. Rev.* 350 (1906).
2. Eugene Lyons, *David Sarnoff* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 74-96.
3. Ibid., p. 174. See Chapter 13, "The Roosevelt Years," pp. 172-187, on Sarnoff's role as public spokesman for business in the nineteen-thirties, including many talks with Roosevelt.
4. Ibid.
5. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), translated by Richard Miller, p. 8.
6. Ibid., p. 30.
7. Ibid., pp. 8-9.
8. See André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969.).
9. See Stanley E. Hilton, *Brazil and the Great Powers, 1930-39:* The Politics of Trade Rivalry (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1975).
10. Cesare Molinari, *Theater Through the Ages* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), tr. by Colin Hamer, p. 54.
11. Northrop Frye, "The Argument of Comedy," (1948), in *The Modern Theatre.* ed. by Daniel Seltzer (Boston: Little-Brown, 1967), p. 26.
12. Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 163.
13. Molinari, op. cit., p. 69.
14. Frye, "The Argument of Comedy," p. 28
15. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism,* p. 164-165.
16. G. S. Gordon, "Theophrastus and His Imitators," in G. S. Gordon, etc., *English Literature and the Classics* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), pp. 51-52.

PETER HARCOURT

Le Nouveau Godard

an exploration of Sauve qui peut (la vie)

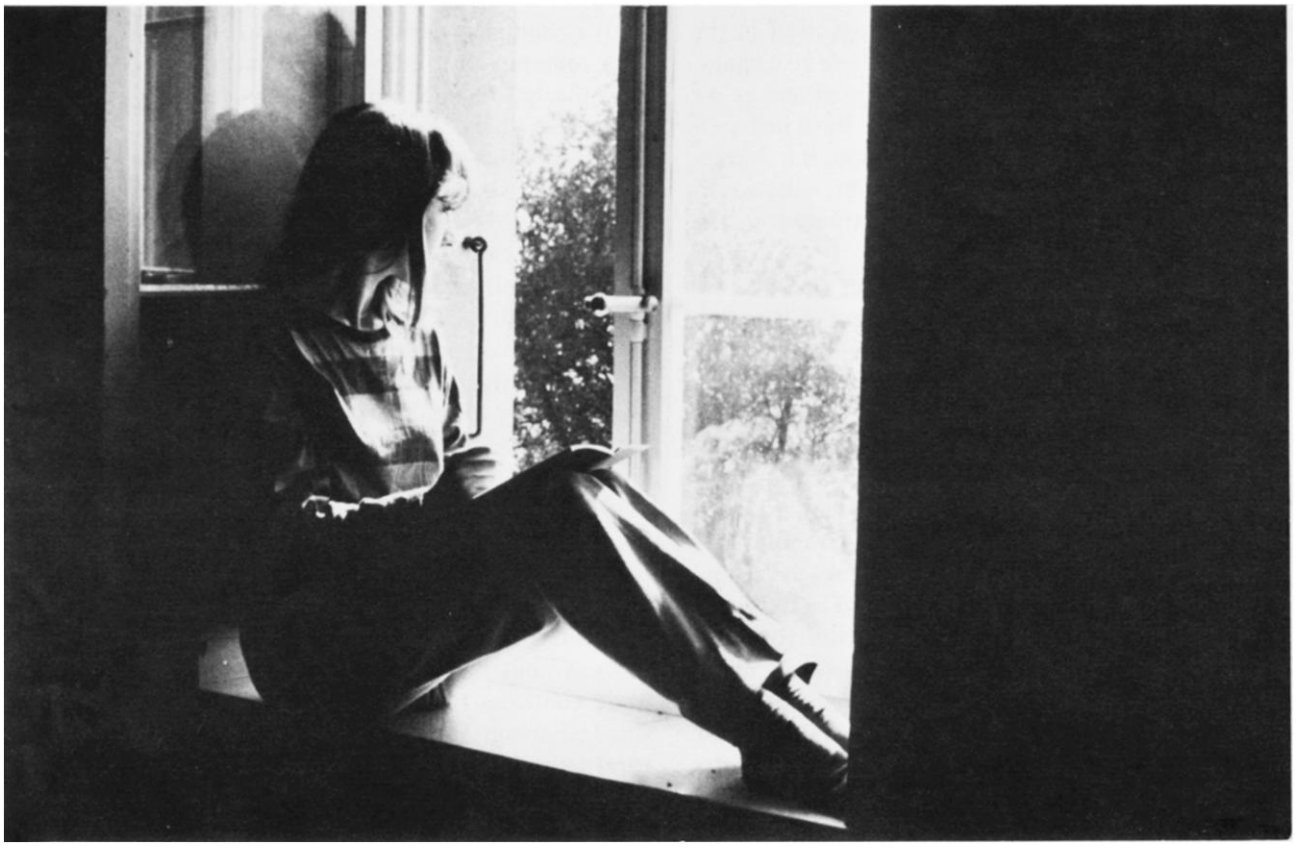
"We live in curious times and amid astonishing contrasts: reason on the one hand, the most absurd fanaticism on the other . . . a civil war in every soul. Sauve qui peut!" —*Voltaire*[1]

Jean-Luc Godard's *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* has yet to receive an adequate reading. Grateful for his re-appearance, the critics praised the film at Cannes for its beauty and its humor. Although baffled by its intricacies, they favored the film and welcomed Godard's return to the theatrical screens.

The film *is* baffling. It is also intricate. It is not what it appears. It dissembles, as if to please us. Like previous films by Godard, *Sauve qui peut* consists of a multiplicity of texts, all hidden within the pretense of a narrative which is, on examination, no narrative at all.

The film is a triptych in five parts. This irrational assertion might be helpful in dealing with the form of the film. It is a portrait of three people presented in five separate sections. One could be less paradoxical by describing the film as a three-part structure framed by a two-part preface and then a coda. Yet paradox is central to the mind of Jean-Luc Godard.

One must return to zero, Godard was saying (echoing Roland Barthes) at the time of *Le gai savoir*, in order to think things through. On a



playful level, *Sauve qui peut* goes further. Over the first part of the title—*Sauve qui peut*—which occurs about one minute after the beginning of the film, Godard superimposes a minus one. A few seconds further on, over the second part of the title—*la vie*—Godard superimposes a zero. This equation of life with zero might seem to be the ultimate moral of this film; at the same time, it is also the point from which begin the film's investigations.

Sauve qui peut (la vie) abounds in contrasts—contrasts that (arguably) are never satisfactorily reconciled. Such narrative as the film contains resolves nothing. If the film begins in the clouds, it ends on an empty city space. The filmic text remains open. Or it returns to zero. We have to work at potential readings of this film.

But throughout this film, the city contrasts with landscape, civilization with nature, the actual with the potential, social life with the inner life of dreams, darkness with light, "reality" with art. And if civilization has been rendered inhuman by the omnipotence of banks—"Only banks are independent," Isabelle is forced to recite—the Swiss landscape is framed in such a way that it often appears artificially beautiful, as if redesigned by civilization and then reframed by Godard. For if contrasts are established, transformations of these contrasts also occur. Meaning is suggested and then snatched away. The film destroys itself in the process of its own creation, only to rise again, phoenix-like, in our own imaginations as we attempt to reconstruct what we have just seen destroyed. If, throughout this film, the characters move from darkness into light, when wrestling with its details we must strive to do the same.

In relation to Godard's earlier work, *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* is not so different as it seems. The bright yellows, reds, and blues that, with a poster-like boldness, accentuated the conflict of values in films like *Pierrot le fou* and *Deux ou trois choses*, are still present in this film, though they are less in the foreground. Near the beginning of the film as Paul Godard in his blue jacket approaches his blue car (pursued by the Italian gay who so wants Paul to "ream" him), there is a yellow car parked in the right-hand corner of the screen. Denise Rimbaud scribbles down her thoughts (which might become a novel) in a blue-covered notebook; and Isabelle, in her red Fiat, is pursued by the pimps in a grey-blue Mercedes. Finally, after Paul's accident (is he struck by the same grey-blue Mercedes that had formerly pursued Isabelle?), in the last shot of the film as Cecile, Paul's daughter, and Colette, Paul's estranged wife, move through a dark alley towards the light in the boulevard that we see through the arch at the end, a yellow car is parked for a time on the right-hand side of the arch while, to the left, there is a rectangular smear of red painted on a wall. While these colors may not be "meaningful" (in that it would be difficult to name a single signified), their presence activates memory and the consistency of their use adds a suggestion of rhyme to the form of the film.

Similarly, if Godard's earlier work was characterized by a disjunctive relationship between images and sounds, so in *Sauve qui peut* (though again, not so boldly) once more these disjunctions occur. Designed at times as if to ape the clever over-lapping of sound and image that characterizes the "seamless suture" of conventional narrative editing, Godard's use of this device has, on analysis, the opposite effect. In that early sequence already mentioned, as Paul drives away from the Italian gay who is after him, we cut to the first shots of Denise on her bicycle in the country. "Evil city!" we hear the gay cry out over these shots of rural escape, before the sounds of sheep-bells and birds accompany Denise on her way, and the first, contemplative step-printing occurs.

Similarly, at a later moment Denise is cycling off to find Michel Piaget (her friend from the past) and swish-sounds are heard as she turns into a field—sounds which at this moment might seem like the sounds of jets. When the next scene is established, however, we recognize these sounds as part of the game of Hornuss—a traditional Swiss game that looks like a mixture of Lacrosse and fishing!

Most effective, perhaps, is the moment when Paul is taking his daughter on her birthday to have dinner with her mother. After he parks his car, the camera follows the two of them left along a most distended Esso service station, over which Cecile's story about blackbirds begins. I will say more about this story in a minute; but right now, the important point about all these overlappings is not their "seamlessness" but the fact that they reinforce the basic contrasts in the film: city vs. country; war technology vs. the competitive sounds of rural sport; industry vs. nature.

Sometimes, in fact, these sonic links disrupt our sense of time as well. When Paul, with Cecile, is meeting Denise at the studio, Denise appears behind the automatic glass panels of the doors. In the only tender embrace that we see between them in the film, they greet one another with apparently great affection. This greeting is further heightened by the effect of step-printing, a device that in this film consistently signals a moment of increased awareness and of personal contemplation. As their arms encircle one another and the television doors behind them judder to a close, their voice-over dialogue seems to come from a previous time. "Will you help me?" she asks. "I'll help you," he replies. "Will you love me much longer?" she again requests. "Longer than you think," he again replies.

Yet this feeling of flashback (from both the physical tenderness and the future potential implicit in this dialogue) is undercut by the narrative overlay which Godard has provided for this film. We see the grumpy Cecile in the car, waiting to drive off to have dinner with her mother; and after the step-printing, the scene immediately degenerates into an abusive row. As if this temporal confusion were not enough, when Paul drives off with Cecile, leaving Denise in comparative darkness with the bright glow of the setting sun shining through the trees behind her, he cries out again, as if indeed to "suture" these two filmic moments: "Longer than you think!"

However, these moments *cannot* coalesce. Affectively from different periods of time, they seem linked by the linear narrative that claims to hold this film together. And yet it doesn't. Once again, as previously in Godard, any easy assimilation on the part of the spectator is blocked by this "irrational" concatenation of events.

As in all films by Godard, in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* the simplest details possess potential meaning. After the slow travelling left over a sky filled with clouds that opens this film, Godard cuts to Paul in his huge Swiss hotel room, trying to phone Denise. A woman is singing opera, apparently in the next room—at least Paul is able to silence her by banging on the wall.

This first scene is a sequence shot. To the left of the screen, there is the white lamp of his bedroom; behind Paul, but still to the left, is the bright light of a window; while to the right, there appears to be another bright window. Only after Paul has failed to get through to Denise and has walked forward towards the camera and out of the frame can we recognize that this second window is a mirror, a mere reflection of the first. Throughout his life as a film-maker, Godard has always contested the more naturalized forms of illusionist practice. Through this window/mirror confusion, Godard shows us that he is still working in much the same way. Even in this film, on the surface so conventional, our eyes cannot passively assume that what we see on the screen is what it appears to be.

Out in the darkened corridor (down an extended escalator which runs from the mezzanine to the street, the operatic voice begins

again. It is apparently diegetic. There is a huge woman in these scenes whom people keep staring at as if she were the one who is singing. At the same time (and we would need keen eyes to be sure of this), her lips don't appear to be moving. Is the music coming from her or is it not? Once again, the irrational confusion of image and sound refuses an answer.

These opening scenes followed by the negative implications of the title, with a minus one moving towards a zero, seem resonant of more potential significance than, at this stage, can easily be named. The grand hotel is the epitome of capitalistic, consumerist activity. Its architecture more suggests the ever-transient impressiveness of an international airport than a space within which one might choose to dwell. It is less than nothing (minus one). Its values are inverted (the beseeching gay). Nevertheless, it has music (grand opera), an effect that, while parodying the ubiquitous Musak, might suggest that certain forms of expensive art (opera, the cinema) now need such a monied environment in order to survive.

When Denise appears, so do the first examples of Godard's step-printing. But even here, the relationship between sound and image is a denaturalizing one. When Denise is arrested in her movement, a sort of jazzy, cocktail-bar motif is heard on the sound track —a theme more appropriate to the grand hotel, one might imagine, than to the stunningly beautiful Swiss countryside. It is only at the end of this moment, when she finally regains her "natural" movement, that she is lent support by the use of "natural" sounds; and it is when we hear the sound of her bicycle plus the chirping of birds that the second part of the title—*la vie*—appears, with its superimposed zero. Given the complex context created for this part of the title—meditative freeze-frames intermingled with natural movement, spatially dislocated music alternating with natural sounds—this zero might imply the tension between artifice and nature from which any creativity must begin.

This suggestion is reinforced by the sequence which follows the title. The "ethereal" theme (as we might call it) that opens the film is heard again as we track along a lake front, visually exploring a beautiful Swiss landscape. Yet, as elsewhere in the film, it is a landscape without a subject, without a character to establish a point of view. Then we pick up Denise again, cycling up a mountain road (with a moment of natural sound as some other cyclists pass her), until finally, we see her in a restaurant opening up her blue notebook in which she plans to jot down those thoughts that might become a novel.

At first, some off-screen male voices are heard; and later, we cut to some women at another table talking about family problems, accidents, and scandals. It is in the middle of this scene, however, that the first of the diegetic references to music occurs. "What's that music?" Denise asks the waitress who is too absorbed by the demands of her work to hear anything at all. This question which is shared by other women in the film has generally been accepted as a joke, as a kind of Buñuelian intradiegetic reference to the background music.[2] While on one level it *is* that, like everything else in the film it is something more as well.

First of all, only the women in the film are privileged to hear it. Denise hears it, (I believe) Isabelle hears it, certainly the dark-haired hooker hears it, even though she only appears in two scenes in the film. So it has something to do with being female and, as later details will suggest, it has something to do with the imagination. Both Denise and Isabelle have interior monologues. With Denise, these monologues supposedly relate to her writing; with Isabelle, they relate to imagined relationships that are different from her monotonous trade as a call-girl. When we link these facts to some of the ideas shared with us by Marguerite Duras during her off-screen reading from *Le Camion* in this film, some interpretations begin to emerge.

The Duras monologue is long and complex. It is chiefly about writing and more specifically about women writing. In this way, in macro-fashion, it refers to the whole problem of creation shared by the two Godards in the film—Paul Godard, the character, and Jean-Luc Godard, the film-maker; and in another way, in micro-fashion, it anticipates Cecile's essay about blackbirds with *her* specific problems of creation which occurs later in the film.

The Duras monologue ends with a discussion of creative territory. "If there is a domain for women," we hear her say, "if there's such a place, I think it's full of childhood, much more childhood than is in man's domain. Men are more childlike than women, but they have less

childhood." One way of understanding these oblique remarks is to relate them further to the two intertitles that introduce respectively both Denise's and Paul's sections of the film: women, Duras/Godard seems to be saying, have more Imagination and less Fear.

Like so many of Godard's previous films, *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* examines absences—the absence of passion, the absence of family, the absence of love. It also explores incapacities and, on the surface, might seem to endorse futilities. Like *Numéro Deux* before it and like *Le Mépris* before that, *Sauve qui peut* is an intricately created statement about the inability to create. But it is not like *8 1/2* or *All That Jazz*. Its rhetoric is too painful, its tone too subdued, its conclusions too tentative. It is in every sense of the word a desperate film, but on reflection, I do not find it nihilistic. In spite of the possible nihilism of the characters, the intricacy of its form affirms.

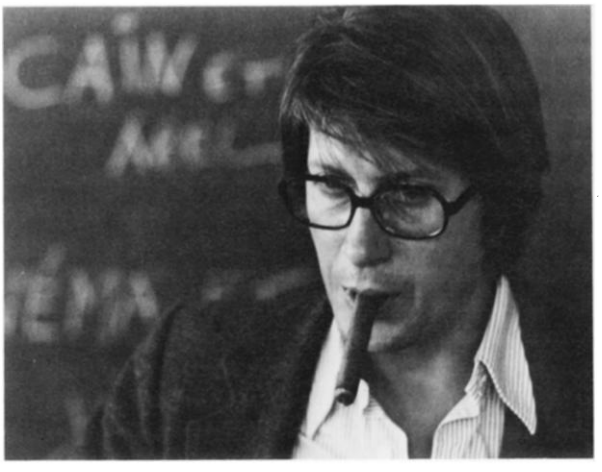
If, unlike Paul, Denise has more imagination and less fear, it is partly that as a woman she has more access to childhood (as Duras has explained) and partly, in terms of the narrative of this film, that she has the determination to leave the darkness of the city for the light of the country. As she talks about her writing, she is trying to determine the meaning of life. Life, she explains to herself, is "a gesture made at a faster pace, an arm which moves off-beat, a step taken slower . . ." This voice-over monologue occurs over a number of different scenes as she talks to Michel about a more "professional" series of articles that she would like to write for him. However, at one point in this sequence, while we see the mechanical arms of Michel's printing press flapping about in the foreground, Denise concludes her monologue by describing life as "that thing in everyone which silently screams out: I am not a machine."

This sequence comes to an end as both Denise and Michel move outside the printing shop. She is talking about her salary for the "paid" work that she hopes to do. The camera leaves her for a moment and follows the dark-haired hooker as she walks past a cow in a field and then Denise cycles past her. "Paid" work of any kind within the contemporary world would seem to involve for Godard a measure of prostitution.

The voice-over scraps from Denise's notebook all have to do with the affirmation of life through language. Yet there are ironies here. Not only do these affirmations contrast with some of Duras's comments about the "dubious" nature of writing, about "the silence that surrounds the text," but they also contrast with what she herself says to Paul while they are sitting in a bar together. "I want to do things," she explains, "not just name them." Yet all we see her *do* is cycle about the countryside, looking at people and (through step-printing) sometimes looking at us. Except when she is talking, she seems more an observer than a participant.

Nevertheless, she is trying to move foward, out and away, even if she doesn't know where she is going. For the last shot we see of her, once again on her bicycle, there is no step-printing. It is as if she has been set free.

This sense of freedom contrasts with Paul's feeling of increasing entrapment. He complains about the lack of a rear-view mirror in his car. He wants to move backwards. Since he is driven on more by fear than by his imagination, he cannot bring himself to leave that air-



Jean-Luc Godard, above; "Paul Godard," below.

conditioned nightmare of a hotel where he is constantly waited upon (we see a chambermaid either bringing him food or taking it away); and even though he and Colette have nothing to say to one another, he wants to see her more often, as if to hang on to an unproductive dependency. In the last shots we see of him after his accident, *all* of them with step-printing, he is touching his own forehead while lying in the street, as if to reassure himself (like Juliette at the end of *Deux ou trois choses*) that he is not yet dead.

While Denise's monologues provide an ongoing discourse about the relationship of words to life, Isabelle's monologues are developed more sequentially. Each one occurs while she is acting out some sexual fantasy for somebody else and each attempts to explore, through her imagination, an alternate life style.

The first monologue occurs while she is in bed with Paul, "faking" her orgasm. It is a family fantasy. She imagines herself as a housewife, tidying up her home throughout the day, in order to make her family realize their dependence on her. "Even in dreams," as Paul says the next morning (after the third intertitle, "Commerce," which relates to Isabelle), "one can't help but look for solutions."

Her second monologue occurs, again with a fine irony, when she is acting out some strange family fantasy for Monsieur Personne, a fantasy that consists largely of verbal indecencies. This time, Isabelle imagines a weekend retreat by the sea with a close friend, with whom "there was a flowing together, without tension." It is only towards the end of this monologue, after Isabelle has imagined herself cooking dinner for her friend and has suggested that they "shack up together" (and here, the visuals cut away from the hotel room to a beautiful shot of a green countryside with blue mountains in the distance), it is only then that we hear that her friend is a woman. This dream of Isabelle's seems to express a desire to escape from the "humiliations" of heterosexual relationships (as she describes them to her sister) through a lesbian love affair. But even in her dream this solution is denied her. Her friend declines.

Isabelle's third and last monologue is really in two parts, the first again a dream and the second a recognition. She is preparing herself for the "orgy" with the fat, capitalistic boss who has power over everyone and finally over language. Initially she is running through a list of the failure of heroes—whether Al Capone, Che Guevera, Malcolm X or whoever. They are all lumped together in this desperate recitation and are all seen as part of the same con, as part of the same "fairy-tale to keep the game going. . . . Each man tries to hang on and be lucky," her voice continues. "All the rest is bullshit." But then, after the fat boss has organized his assembly-line sex, rehearsing first the visuals and then the sound (thereby suggesting an equation between his own activities and those of a film-maker), Isabelle looks at him with insight and with what might be called a terrible compassion. "I was looking at that ivory face," she says, "and I saw it was filled with dark pride, with wild strength." Then, as she is applying lipstick to his flaccid mouth, she continues by describing the face as filled as well "with abject terror and with a terminal despair—*un désespoir immense et sans remède.*"

While Isabelle is performing her mechanical actions, a vase full of flowers dominates her image on the screen. In this way, nature is once again contrasted with industry, with the fragmentation of assembly-line sex. No one is dealing with the whole of another person, only with a part—like the Ford assembly-line sequence in *British Sounds.* This fragmentation is what makes everything so desperate and without solution. And as we can detect from the dialogue that there is another woman on the floor whom we never see, and as we notice the boss's face reflected through twin images in his window to the side of his desk, Godard once again asks us to consider the relationship of sound to image, of the reflection to the object, and of the cinematic to the real.

The "kinky" sex that dominates this film is all part of this fragmentation. Again and again, the film depicts an absence of wholeness. Denise's friend in the country who manages an industrialized farm enjoys anal licks from sadly carrelled cows. Paul's incestuous feelings for his daughter, his desire "to feel her tits or fuck her up the ass," is the result (it seems to me) of the absence of continual, touching contact that one might enjoy within a real family that lives together and shares together. When affective flow is blocked, one reifies the parts.

The divisiveness in this film is the result of a technologized civilization, managed by banks, that has gone out of control. At the

cinema one evening, an angry father, his child all wrapped around his shoulders, rages at the cashier because the film has lost its sound. The projectionist has gone home, expecting the automated technology to do his job for him. Across the street by a lamp-post, a young woman wants to go to the movies so she can be finger-fucked by her boyfriend. He seems indifferent, both to the cinema and to her. Meanwhile, he is reading a magazine called

À Suivre—to be continued.

An actual family appears in this film, but only parenthetically, like an echo from the past. Once they all appear, absurdly, at a corner in a field as Denise cycles past them. Later on they appear, equally absurdly, on a bench on a balcony, with Paul sitting next to them. The mother is always holding her two children, their arms wrapped around her, while the father plays his accordion, creating "music" by the skill of his own hands. If this family seems to come from the past, as part of Swiss folklore, there are two other moments in the film that suggest affirmation. One moment recognizes, the other analyzes.

The recognitional moment occurs towards the end of the film. Denise and Isabelle are sitting in a car, talking about love and their problems with men. It is one of the warmest exchanges that occur in this film, suggesting the strong bonding that can now exist between women. Denise notices an inscription that Isabelle has pasted up in her car. "Don't forget," Denise reads aloud, "a carrot shivers before the knife, salad screams when it is torn, and cabbage cries when it is boiled."[3] All nature should be acknowledged, all living things. But this, of course, is what so many other moments in the film deny.

The analytical moment occurs earlier in the film. It concerns the same theme. It is also spoken by a woman, by a young woman who not only has access to childhood but who is still a child—the sullen Cecile.

She is writing an essay which she reads aloud to her father about the migration of blackbirds. It is a beautiful story, too long to quote in detail; but it suggests a totally "imaginative" interpretation of history. During the last two hundred years, Cecile's essays explains, more terrifying than all the imperialistic conquests, all the violence, all the systematic genocide is the fact that blackbirds have left their natural home in the forests to become city birds. Cecile reads her essay but can't think of an ending. Her mother refuses to help her—"I don't feel like having ideas today"—so Paul comes in and finishes it: "No one dares interpret the last two hundred years of history in terms of the invasion of the cities of man by the blackbird." He then offers a wan smile as he puffs on his cigar. For this one moment in the film, he looks pleased with himself.

Through the way it is presented, in a little parenthesis, this moment in the film is received as funny. But it is followed by hostility: Cecile wants her presents, Colette wants her cheque. This story really provides the moral center of the film, *de*centered though it be in terms of the film's narrative. As this migration began

in England (according to Cecile) and then spread all over Europe, it obviously directly relates to the industrial revolution. The blackbirds might well be blackbirds, creatures of nature; but they might also suggest the men who left their farms in the country for the factories in the cities. The two women in the film (who have less fear and more imagination) both want to leave the city for the country, and it is another young woman who tells this story. Thus, whatever our reading, there is an implied opposition between the more "natural" values of women and the unnatural "work" values of men.

But as Peter Wollen pointed out a good many years ago, in films by Godard there is never a simple schema. Ideas, even characters, criss-cross one another and contest each other's values.[4] Denise too, at certain moments in the film, seems very much concerned with her work—more so than Paul; and if men are linked to the city, through the references to *Le Camion* the trucks that pass are linked to the work of Marguerite Duras. As Paul explains to that class (all in darkness) at which Duras refuses to appear, "everytime you see a truck passing, think about her film—*que c'est une parole d'une femme qui passe.*"

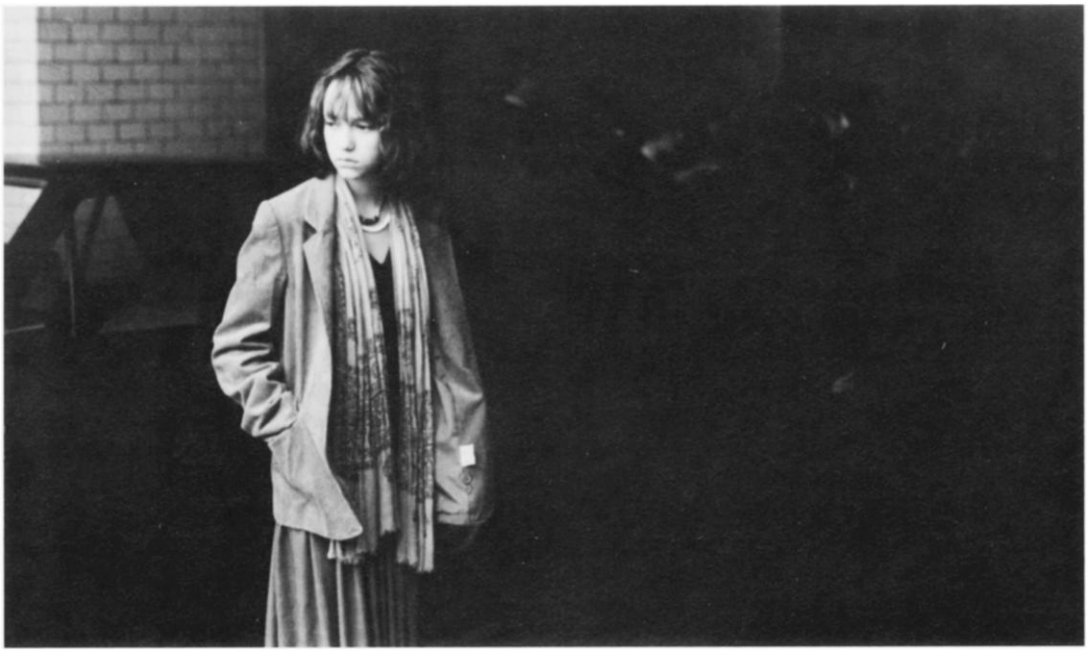
Thus, conflicting values exist in this film and they are not all nihilistic. If moments in the film can indeed be experienced as "funny," the jokes are always desperate. They are aimed at the apparently unchangeable world of advanced technology. It is as if we are being invited to laugh at a vision of the end of the world.

Like other Godard films but this time even more so, *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* resists linear exegesis. Godard himself, employing a kind of visual italics, freezes his images to heighten our perception of certain moments in his film; if we ourselves slow it down even further (through repeated screenings or through a viewing on a table), each moment in the film seems simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal, referring outwards to the rest of the film and yet requiring the context of the whole to give meaning to the part. If the film contains a search for "passion," three times in the film that word is denied when used by another person. If passion still exists, apparently it can't be shared.

As always with Godard, we return again to paradox, to the insistent feeling of absence, to the ubiquitous presence of lack. Yet *Sauve qui peut* is so intricately structured that it limits easy access to the voice of its own creator. It affirms in parentheses. In this way, it is very different from *Numéro Deux. Numéro Deux* situated Godard himself within the problematic of the film both through his self-dismemberment at the opening (his head separated from the rest of his body and isolated on a tiny television screen) and through his powerlessness at the end, his head on his arms, his hands clutching the switches of his sound-mixing machine. But if in *Numéro Deux,* the hopeless hands can nevertheless bring up the sounds of music and birds that supply a tiny note of aural affirmation for the end of this film, so in *Sauve qui peut* bird sounds and music repeatedly suggest other values struggling to get through. And if the three main intertitles of this film—Imagination, Fear, and Commerce—are linked (though again with crisscrossing) to the three main characters, so the last intertitle, Music, is linked to the entire film.

Music has always been crucial to the films of Godard, but it has been very little talked about. Partly, it is very difficult to turn music into words. Arguably, music is the least ideological of all the arts. It speaks beyond the socialized falsifications of language. It is an intricate signifying system with no describable signified. In Hollywood, background music has traditionally played a purely affective role, often creating in the audience an emotion that is dramatically not fully present on the screen. Godard's use of music, however, has always (like Bresson's) been more dialectical. For instance, in both *Une Femme mariée* and in *Deux ou trois choses,* the bits of Beethoven suggest a value system, derived from the past, of which the characters are no longer a part. And in *Pierrot le fou* music seems intended to express the inexpressible, to suggest an interiority that really can't be shared.

However, in *Deux ou trois choses,* when Godard relinquished the bits and pieces of traditional culture that so haunted his mind and in *Masculin-Feminin,* when he gave up his own search for romantic love, music slipped away from his films. During the Dziga-Vertov period with Jean-Pierre Gorin, he addressed himself to a more directly political type of cinematic practice and music scarcely appeared



at all. Yet by the time he made *Numéro Deux* (now, as in *Sauve qui peut,* working with Anne-Marie Miéville), music is back again and is described at one point in the film as that which allows one "to see the incredible." In *Sauve qui peut (la vie),* there are a number of musical themes, only a few of which I have referred to, each one of which seems to suggest different values and they finally combine in intricate yet indescribable ways.

If the music begins in the sky, it ends on the ground. If at the first, it seems to come from the heavens, it is diegetically "placed" by the string orchestra in the street past which Colette and Cecile walk during the final sequence in the film. And if Godard's privileged women also are able to hear it, this film has not been directed but "composed" by Jean-Luc Godard! For Godard, music obviously represents some values that he can neither show nor name.

By these comments, I don't mean to re-bourgeoisify Godard. His is still one of the most radical cinematic practices that we have on the screen. Except, for this film, Godard has had to pretend that it is not.

Godard has always possessed a splintered audience. Many people who like his early work reject the Dziga-Vertov period, while many people who applaud the Dziga-Vertov films deplore his earlier work and have denounced both *Numéro Deux* and *Sauve qui peut* as a return to personalism.

But Godard has never been any one thing. If the Dziga-Vertov period was crucial for Godard in his attempt to find a more than personal solution to the problems of life (as Paul was unable to in *Masculin-Feminin*), neither *Vent d'est* nor *Lotte in Italia* (the most challenging of these filmic essays) changed the habits of film-goers. Nor did they change the political map of the world.

As a film-maker, Godard is the sum product of all the films he has made, from his earliest shorts to this latest feature film. And to make films, you need a story, you need stars, and you need money (as Godard and Gorin declared at the opening of *Tout va bien*). Finally, however, you also need an audience. You need to be *received.* You have to be looked at. You have to be heard.

If, in *Sauve qui peut (la vie),* Godard has fooled some audiences into thinking he has made a beautiful film or a funny film, this was his compromise with his need for survival. And those more severe critics who have called the film's references to incest and anal sex disgusting are committing the same conceptual error that Godard's cinema has always challenged: they are assuming a one-to-one relationship between image and referent, between illusion and the real.

The scene with the capitalist boss is not just any orgy. It provides a paradigm for the frag-

mented, fractionalized, subservient, dehumanized, and depersonalized nature of the film industry, of the nature of most work today and, increasingly, of the nature of the world. It is a game controlled by commerce in which human beings are simply pawns. As radical a denunciation as anything we might find in *Vent d'est*, the film is neither a sell-out nor a celebration. It is Godard's intelligent yet painful view of the world.

Sauve qui peut (la vie) has *still* to receive an adequate reading. Working inductively from some of the more obvious details in the film, I have simply tried to suggest that the film is both more interesting and ultimately more radical than it may seem. It is a film that has been shaped to fit into the cinema Machine—that whole network of production, promotion, and exhibition which determines, more and more, what films get made and then which of those get seen. The anecdotal surface of the film is largely a ruse, as if to please or titillate the lumpen-bourgeoisie. Like fables from ancient times, like Aesop and La Fontaine, the true "moral" of *Sauve qui peut* has been cunningly encoded, decipherable only by the very few who really care, by what is left (I guess) of the *cinéphile élite*.

The above account, however, can claim to be only a partial decoding. For there are obviously other things that need to be said. Godard still lives. It is the cinema that is dead—the cinema as we used to know it. How can that relationship manage to continue?

NOTES

1. Quoted in *The Ancien Régime*, by C.B.A. Behrens (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967).
2. The many "Buñuelian" moments in this film, particularly the string orchestra in the street at the end, may be partly the result of the role that Jean-Claude Carrière played in writing the script for this film. He has several times worked with Buñuel.
3. This citation is ascribed in the film to Angelo Napoli, 15 October 1979. While he is supposedly a friend of Isabelle, the precision of this naming and dating might suggest a living person, although I have been unable to find out if this is so.
4. See Lee Russell (alias Peter Wollen), "Jean-Luc Godard—a reply to Robin Wood," in *New Left Review* (London), No. 39, 1966.

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BRUCE A. AUSTIN, MARK J. NICOLICH, AND THOMAS SIMONET*

M.P.A.A. Ratings and the Box Office: Some Tantalizing Statistics

We now have more than a decade of experience with the MPAA ratings system, and can thus test whether initial expectations about the economic effects of the ratings were accurate. The restricted ratings (R and X) were originally foreseen as handicaps, but also symbols of "forbidden fruit" attractiveness; the unrestricted ratings (G and PG) were predicted by some to affect box office positively ("safe") or negatively ("childish"). Over the years a consensus emerged in published comments, seemingly based on unsystematic observation: G and X, it was frequently said, were "box-office poison," while PG and R were helpful.[1]

Producers apparently accepted these evaluations—at least if we assume, as seems altogether reasonable from a variety of inside accounts, that they generally received the ratings they aimed their films at. Their finished films amounted to a hearty endorsement of PG and R: to date more than 78% of rated films, while less than 22% were G or X (see Table 1).

It was not difficult to test whether the producers' choices were financially sound. We ran a computer analysis of the approximately 5,000 films rated during the period 1968-1979, to determine which rating gives a film the best odds of achieving box-office "success," defined as domestic rentals of at least $1 million in 1969 dollars as reported in *Variety* (the floor was adjusted upward for inflation each year). Obviously, whether a film that takes in $1 million is profitable depends on its budget as well as foreign income; but accurate budgets, like many fiscal details in the industry, are seldom available for analysis. We could, however, verify that our findings applied at various levels of box-office success ($2 million, $5 million, $10 million and $20 million) and no significant differences from the pattern at $1 million were found.

Table 2 shows the annual success ratios, which ranged from a low of 15.1% (in 1974) to a high of 30.5% (1979). As can be seen from Table 3, PG proved the most successful category, with an overall success ratio of 26.7%. Surprisingly, the second-best category was not R but G: the "family films" enjoyed a ratio of 24.2%, not significantly lower. But R, the category most popular with producers, had a significantly lower ratio: only 13.7%. We surmise that there was a constant market for a certain volume of R films, no matter how many were released: between 20 and 33 R films reached the adjusted million-dollar level each year, even though the total released varied from 83 to 276 annually. X, the category with the smallest number of films, also had the lowest success ratio, 5.0%, and since 1977 not a single X-rated film earned $1 million (adjusted). (This, again, does not necessarily mean that some very low-budget X's didn't show a profit.)

Causal relationships cannot be inferred from these findings because many variables in the film production and release system could not be "controlled." However, it is interesting to speculate on the differences that appeared. PG films, accessible to all audience members, probably benefit from having no negative associations such as the "childish" implications of G or the "adult" implications of R and X. The much maligned G films likely benefit from their universally acceptable—if often bland—content. But another explanation could be that producers of G films know their audiences better than producers of restricted films. Put another way, a relatively high proportion of G-film producers may go ahead with a production only when a hit is highly probable.

The relatively low success ratios of R and X could be explained by the obvious limitations that the rating system imposes on potential audience size. If this were the reason, it would

*Austin teaches at Rochester Institute of Technology, Nicolich is staff statistician at the College of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, and Simonet teaches at Rider College. A full report of this study was presented to the University Film Association in Austin, Texas and is available in ERIC ED 191 102.

be evidence that the system was accepted by the public and/or enforced by theater operators. Other possible contributing factors could be:

* Limitations on bookings and advertising of restricted films
* Underreporting in *Variety* of actual revenues from drive-in R's and porno X's

But perhaps the most interesting speculation to be made about our findings is this: the fact that the category most popular with producers (R) has only the third highest success ratio may simply be evidence that the public's moral tastes are more conservative than Hollywood's.

TABLE 1

MPAA RATINGS FOR FEATURE FILMS, 1969–1979*

Year	G Films	PG Films	R Films	X Films	Total Films
1969	24.9%	42.8%	25.5%	6.8%	325 (100%)
1970	15.5	33.6	41.1	9.7	431
1971	17.5	36.6	36.3	9.6	513
1972	16.7	42.6	38.7	2.0	540
1973	14.9	33.0	47.3	4.8	584
1974	14.3	35.6	45.5	4.6	523
1975	13.5	35.7	45.3	5.4	459
1976	12.8	30.9	44.0	12.3	486
1977	11.9	39.4	42.3	6.3	378
1978	11.7	44.0	37.7	6.6	334
1979	6.1	40.2	44.3	9.4	361

*Source: MPAA, Classification and Rating Administration Annual Reports.

Note: Percentage totals (by year) may not equal 100 due to rounding.

TABLE 2

FREQUENCIES AND SUCCESS RATIOS OF MPAA-RATED FEATURE FILMS: 11-YEAR SUMMARY

Year	Features Rated	Rentals Over $1M*	Success Ratio
1969	325	84	25.8%
1970	431	69	16.0%
1971	513	79	15.4%
1972	540	85	15.7%
1973	584	90	15.4%
1974	523	79	15.1%
1975	459	90	19.6%
1976	486	94	19.3%
1977	378	92	24.3%
1978	334	90	26.9%
1979	361	110	30.5%

*Domestic rentals in 1969 dollars.

TABLE 3

MPAA RATING FREQUENCIES AND SUCCESS RATIOS, 1969–1979

	G Films			PG Films			R Films			X Films		
Year	Features Rated	Rentals Over $1M*	Success Ratio	Features Rated	Rentals Over $1M*	Success Ratio	Features Rated	Rentals Over $1M*	Success Ratio	Features Rated	Rentals Over $1M*	Success Ratio
1969	81	28	34.6%	139	32	23.0%	83	20	24.1%	22	4	18.2%
1970	67	19	28.4%	145	24	16.6%	177	22	12.4%	42	4	9.5%
1971	90	21	23.3%	188	33	17.6%	186	22	11.8%	49	3	6.1%
1972	90	15	16.7%	230	43	18.7%	209	26	12.4%	11	1	9.1%
1973	87	20	23.0%	193	41	21.2%	276	27	9.8%	28	2	7.1%
1974	75	13	17.3%	186	35	18.8%	238	30	12.6%	24	1	4.2%
1975	62	11	17.7%	164	52	31.7%	208	26	12.5%	25	1	4.0%
1976	62	13	21.0%	150	57	38.0%	214	23	10.7%	60	1	1.7%
1977	45	14	31.1%	149	54	36.2%	160	24	15.0%	24	0	0.0%
1978	39	8	20.5%	147	55	37.4%	126	27	21.4%	22	0	0.0%
1979	22	12	54.6%	145	65	44.8%	160	33	20.6%	34	0	0.0%
Annual Average	65.5	15.8		167.0	44.6		185.2	25.5		32	1.6	
Total	720	174	24.2%	1,836	491	26.7%	2,037	280	13.7%	341	17	5.0%

*Frequencies of films with domestic rentals over $1 million in 1969 dollars.

NOTES

1. Armchair philosophy and speculation on the movie rating system vis-à-vis audience appeal has been plentiful. *Sounder* producer Robert B. Radnitz testified at a House hearing that a G rating was "an audience turn off" and that "Because of the public's antipathy to the G, we filmmakers are eschewing certain fine film subjects, and the treatment of same" (Subcommittee on Special Small Business Problems, "Movie Ratings and the Independent Producer," H.R., 95th Congress, 2nd session, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 21, 1978). For additional remarks on the G rating see: "Modern Kids Shy from G; 'Marker' Happy with PG," *Variety*, April 9, 1980, pp. 7, 30; Ingo Preminger, "M*A*S*H Notes," *Esquire*, August 1970, pp. 60, 138, 142. Georgia Jeffries asserts that "Many producers try to ensure a PG or R rating by the gratuitous addition of 'strong' language or nudity or violence" ("The Problem with G," *American Film*, June 1978, p. 51). For information on the desirability of PG and R ratings see: Dale Pollock, "Ratings Struggle to Stay Abreast," *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1980, Part IV, pp., 1, 4 and Neal Zoren, "That 'R' can Sell More Tickets," *Camden* (N.J.) *Courier-Post*, Feb. 10, 1979, p. 17. The X rating has been perceived as a category to be avoided—at least among mainstream producers. Stephen Farber, who for six months was a member of the MPAA's Classification and Rating Administration, wrote that ". . . an X rating cuts a film's revenue by as much as fifty percent chiefly as a result of . . . theater and newspaper bans [on advertising] . . . the X rating has become a tremendous liability" (*The Movie Rating Game*, Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1972, p. 48).

Systematic and controlled research on the movie rating system has been scarce. However, for information on the relationship between ratings and film rentals see: Kenneth H. Davidson, testimony before the Subcommittee on Special Small Business Problems, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-58 and Bruce A. Austin, "Rating the Movies," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 7 (no. 4, 1980), pp. 384-399. For information on the effect of movie ratings on attendance, as well as additional reviews of the popular rhetoric on the rating system, see: Bruce A. Austin, "The Influence of the MPAA's Film-Rating System on Motion Picture Attendance: A Pilot Study," *Journal of Psychology* 106 (Sept. 1980), pp. 91-99; Bruce A. Austin, "M.P.A.A. Film Rating Influence on Stated Likelihood of High School Student Film Attendance: A Test of Reactance Theory," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, May 1981; Bruce A. Austin, "Movie Ratings and Their Effect on Movie Attendance," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association conference, Anaheim, CA, November 1981.

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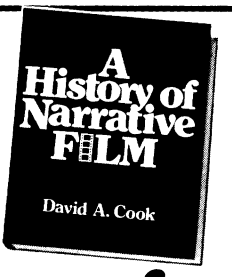

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RANDALL CONRAD

Mystery and Melodrama: A Conversation With Georges Franju

Georges Franju, who hates to travel, crossed the channel last winter and presented a recent film at the 1980 London Festival. Ever since Franju switched to working for television, fifteen years ago, he has practically cut himself off from international audiences. (In the economics of TV, it's unprofitable to subtitle and export a program, as would be done for an "art" film.) Answering viewers' questions and giving this interview, he reestablished some much-needed contact with his public.

The great French director has always been rather insular culturally, even at the height of his fame. To this day Franju is probably best known for the two early documentaries that propelled him into the front ranks of "anarchist cinema," right alongside Vigo and Buñuel: *Le Sang des bêtes* (*Blood of the Beasts*, in which we behold the operations of a slaughterhouse) and *Hôtel des Invalides* (in which we tour the Napoleonic institution of that name, part war museum and part veterans' infirmary). Each short film is complex and flawless, a masterpiece of black humor; Franju treats his violent subject matter with irony and a distancing touch of aestheticism.

The films we talk about in this interview, however, are his dramatic features. Irony and black humor, violence and aestheticism are the hallmarks of Franju's fiction too. So is melodrama. I asked Franju to discuss his rather complicated idea of melodrama not only because it is explicitly the subject of his most recent film, but also because it is a thread that illuminates his entire body of fiction filmmaking—the dark thrillers and the literary adaptations alike.

THERÈSE DESQUEYROUX

LE SANG DES BÊTES

It may help to recall that body of work, briefly. (For a full account of the major films through 1965, see Raymond Durgnat's insightful *Franju*—University of California Press, 1968.) Franju's documentary interest in what we nowadays call "institutionalization" extended into the first dramatic feature he made, *La tête contre les murs* (*Head Against the Walls*, also called *The Keepers*), the main setting of which is an insane asylum. In *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, another kind of institution —bourgeois marriage—stifles a woman and brings out her murderous and self-destructive urges, though her harrowing experience leads her to discover freedom in the end.

Thomas l'imposteur (Thomas the Impostor) was based on *The Source*, Jean Cocteau's aphoristic novel of manners, filled with metaphors of acting and theatricality—but the shocker is its contemporary background, the carnage of World War I. Franju's stunning visualization captures the nightmarish landscape of war, the arbitrariness of death by violence, and the mysterious reciprocity between the narcissistic adolescent Thomas and his alien environment. (I suppose Franju also spotted this last theme in Joseph Conrad's

Anouk Aimée and Jean-Pierre Mocky: LA TÊTE CONTRE LES MURS

short story *The Shadow Line*, though I haven't seen his TV version.)

La faute de l'abbé Mouret (The Sin of Father Mouret), was a rare return to theatrical feature film after Franju's move to television. Emile Zola's anticlerical novel offered such possibilities that Franju was long convinced he wouldn't be permitted to film it. When the opportunity did come, Franju showed himself an unusually aggressive polemicist, leaving us in no doubt that the Church draws its power from male hatred of women and sustains itself by persecuting the innocent in the name of a false purity.

Yet perhaps the real Franju lurks most completely in a pair of films that are unencumbered by the burden of serious literary origins —*Les yeux san visage (Eyes Without a Face)* and *Judex*. In them, Franju's magic and humor have been fully catalyzed by the melodramatic stuff of pulp scenarios. The first is a mad-surgeon story, rendered obsessive and truly frightening by Franju's documentary attention to atmosphere and detail; the other is a marvelous reworking of Louis Feuillade's silent-era serial about a righter of wrong and protector of innocence. These, I suspect, are the films Franju's admirers remember most vividly, perhaps because they happen to depict, in opposite aspects, a dark undercurrent shaping our art and culture (including melodrama) as powerfully as it conditions our lives: the determining sexual attitude which has lately occasioned revival of the old word "chivalry." *Eyes Without a Face* is its perversity, its real side; *Judex*—the only film from which Franju decided to *remove* melodrama in order to render it "magic" instead—is its impossible nobility.

The film Franju showed at the London Festival was *Le dernier mélodrame (The Last Melodrama)*. This time Franju takes us to the source: "melodrama" refers literally to that genre of sensational drama which originated in France (and spread to other countries) soon after the revolution of 1789, filled the "boulevard" theaters of Paris throughout the 19th-century prime of bourgeois society, and in our era has been "largely superseded by sensational screen dramas" (as my *Oxford Companion* mildly puts it).

Set in the 1950s, Franju's story concerns the demise of the Larémolière players, three generations of stage actors who have started to feel their obsolescence. They still make a living in a remote country town, every night setting up their crude backdrops and putting on shows like *Les Misérables*, featuring villainous persecutions of the innocent. The actors themselves, Franju makes it clear, are no great spellbinders for the modern audience; their histrionics (quite traditionally) are on a level with their painted backgrounds, and old Larémolière

Raymond Bussières, as Laremolière, perishing in a curtain of flame: LE DERNIER MELODRAME. *(Photos courtesy Georges Franju)*

himself has grown too fond of the local tavern. Unevenly, however, the spell does take hold: the tavernkeeper's wife wants to join the troupe and run off. Rejected, she becomes vengeful. One night Larémolière and his son ad-lib the dialogue in *Lucrèce Borgia* with cracks about the pope's incestuous relations. From then on, it is as if the accumulated drama of a winter's playgoing has charged the townspeople with a collective hostility. "The pope is the pope, after all." The men forbid their wives to attend, and the actors stand guard with shotguns. In a theatrical succession of ironies, the innkeeper loses his life in a midnight attempt on the theater, his frustrated wife—savior and destroyer—finishes the job by setting fire to the stage, and old Larémolière perishes in a curtain of flames. The troupe is finished.

What is *The Last Melodrama* like as a film? Compared with the deep, dark compositions in Franju's great theatrical features, the 16mm format is a limiting one. But Franju mobilizes new resources (crisp, autumnal color) and favorite effects (stark, night-lighting) to enhance the mysterious power of Larémolière's last melodrama. One remembers, in a fleeting scene, Edith Scob made up in white powder, spinning a melody on her flute, absorbed in unreality. And Juliette Mills as the innkeeper's wife, her long red hair unbound, gazing at her own face in the mirror and whispering, stage-struck, "I too shall have that power . . ." And the final scenes, which trace an orange curtain of flame, of fate, of change, against the black sky.

However, the narrative itself is episodic, even repetitious. No doubt this suits the film well to the conditions of television viewing. On the big screen, it loses some impact. The story meanders a little, like the trail of combustible fuel in the finale. But at those moments when Franju's humor causes it to ignite, we feel its power.

Franju has said that the original script is based on an idea of Pierre Brasseur's dating from 1964, and that he couldn't see doing it in those days. "It was at the time when Vilar had his greatest triumphs, at the Avignon Festival, and no one was interested in melodrama. They had stopped accepting that mix-

Edith Scob ("Colombine") in Franju's Le Dernier Melodrame

ture of irony and emotion that is at the heart of melodrama—or perhaps they weren't yet ready to accept it."[1] Years later in a more favorable atmosphere, a television channel called FR3 offered Franju the chance to direct any script of his choice, and *The Last Melodrama* was born.

In the interim, melodrama in film had been rehabilitated by some of the new European film-makers, chiefly perhaps Rainer Werner Fassbinder. New critical trends had begun to vindicate melodrama too. (Today there is evidently a scholarly vogue, in fact.) However, it is worth insisting that when Fassbinder, for example, writes on Sirk or when he creates an *Ali* or a *Fox,* his concept of melodrama differs from the one Franju is exploring. True, they are close in some respects. Formally, for example, both concepts revert to conventional narrative norms. But they are fundamentally divergent in their intentions. Fassbinder (at any rate from *The Merchant of Four Seasons* to *Maria Braun*) uses melodrama as a means of touching the greatest number of viewers with his social consciousness. Franju's project, which is less rational—he inherited it from surrealism and Buñuel, and he has dramatized it in his many stories of *madness almost confined*—is a means of stirring up the embers that he knows are smouldering in our darknesses.

●

Until The Last Melodrama *I hadn't seen a Franju film since* The Sin of Father Mouret. *Have you been working entirely for television?*

I had let go of theatrical film somewhat for the past ten or more years, for partly professional and partly sentimental reasons. In film-making, you know, you have to hang on or you're sunk. I began making features with *Head Against the Wall* in 1959, and from then on I was making a film every year. I never had to look for a producer. I was in a pretty strong position until *Thomas the Impostor* in 1965.

My casting of *Eyes Without a Face* is an example of that. I hardly knew Edith Scob's name at the time, but I knew I wanted her for the star of this film. I had spotted her one day while shooting *Head Against the Wall,* and I

had directed her in a small part just by saying "Look this way, look that way, open your mouth . . ." So I had no idea what she could do—but I had a feeling. In those days you could do things like casting an unknown. There were lots of different distributors and so you could work lots of combinations. Here's how *Eyes Without a Face* got put together. Brasseur was a big stage name, though not a film star. We got Italy by having Alida Valli, and Germany by having Juliette Mayniel because a film she made with Chabrol had just done well there. Yet the star was an unknown, Edith Scob—because that's how I wanted it. You can't make those deals in the French industry today. There's just one big distributor, Gaumont. Your lead would have to be a name star to suit Gaumont.

Everybody told me I shouldn't do *Thomas the Impostor* even though I liked Cocteau's work and he liked mine. Cocteau had told me, "I'm giving you *Thomas* because you did *Hôtel des Invalides.*"[2] He wanted to see it filmed in a documentary style, with no reference to an aesthetic, even Cocteau's aesthetic. If Cocteau had directed *Thomas* himself it would have been *Orpheus.* But Cocteau warned me he wasn't sure a film of *Thomas the Impostor* would succeed with the public. "What can one dreamer make of another?" he asked, meaning me and him. Right—the film was an intellectual success, but it wasn't popular.

The film I had made from Mauriac's *Thérèse Desqueyroux,* on the other hand, had done very well with both the critics and the public. It was the opposite of the Cocteau. Thérèse has a double identity; Thomas has no identity. Thérèse runs toward truth; Thomas flies toward untruth. In Mauriac, everything comes together—first there are the pine forests, then two houses . . . one house . . . one family . . . one guy . . . one girl . . . It all comes together. And explodes. I could go beyond Mauriac's novel and explode it. I could make it a melodrama.

In Cocteau, everything comes apart. You've got Thomas, the princess, the convoy, the battlefield . . . I can't go farther than that. And that was my whole trouble; I could not go beyond Cocteau. Cocteau's story is a drama, but the war is a tragedy. And the film is not a tragedy; basically I'd almost say that it brings joy even though it ends tragically. Cocteau had a feeling for drama, but not suffering. Cocteau's people—as he said himself—dream. But Mauriac's people suffer. In Mauriac, the theme is hatred, and the public likes that. There are two Thérèses: the somewhat homosexual girl attracted to her friend Anne, and the grownup who wants to be married and settled. That's why she tries to poison her husband. It's the ambivalence of this conflict that brings out Thérèse's deeper feeling, her sense of death.

Thomas the Impostor wasn't a commercial success because it looks at war from the sidelines. Cocteau and I both refuse to make war look glorious, pathetic, tragic. If you make it tragic you've already made it attractive. You'll notice that most "anti-war" films say war is terrible, but there's still something good about it, there's a brotherhood in arms, a camaraderie, it makes a man out of you, it creates friendship . . . Cocteau wanted to show that war is dirty, period. He has a nice sentence in the novel: "At the front—as though the frequency of the deaths, woundings and uninterrupted risks caused each man to die more than once—death, paid out in small change, lost its value." And that's true!

So after *Thomas the Impostor* I had a lot of trouble. And I didn't put up much resistance. I just let myself be carried along by TV work, that's all. But now I want to get back to theatrical features. I have a great project in the works right now. I can't give the details until the rights to the book have been cleared, but it's the story of a false hero, a writer—a lyric poet—who fancies he'll join the service during World War II and be a hero. But the minute he's in contact with the enemy, he betrays everybody, he becomes the antihero.

It sounds like the inverse of Rossellini's General Della Rovere.

Completely the inverse.

And isn't it a little like Thomas the Impostor?

The guy is a little like Thomas, it's true. But the story is different, it's really something.

But—with this antihero—the new film won't succeed commercially either, will it?

Yes it will. It's very realistic.

Your other anti-war films have essentially focused on the first world war, not the second.

Really only *Hôtel des Invalides* and *Thomas the Impostor.*

Your Judex *too is situated in 1914, as if the coming war were a watershed, as if there would be no more Judexes.*[3]

Shootout at the Bercy wharf in Louis Feuillade's FANTÔMAS.
(Photo: Museum of Modern Art)

Perhaps. But it's war in general. I hate all war. Another project I have now for a feature film is a crime story. With Ionesco as an actor. The story is by Chase, a well-known novelist, and I'm writing the screenplay with Georges Pérec. With all this, I have yet to find a producer. You'd think some producer would go for a project with names like that.[4] The French film industry ought to have a sort of information switchboard. Directors or screenwriters would say, "Here's what I want to do, here's who I'd like to work with," and when a producer was hiring he'd just press the button and get the right combination. The wrong people are assigned to do films even though there are other film-makers who were just made to do them. I wanted to shoot *Fantômas* as well as *Judex*, but Hunebelle did it.

I've seen his Fantômas.

It's really bad. There's an interesting thing about the original, by the way. If you compare Feuillade's *Fantômas* with the novels that Allain and Souvestre wrote, the novels are filled with crimes—nonstop crimes.[5] But in Feuillade's version, for reasons of both censorship and morality, you never see the crimes. And yet Feuillade's film feels very close to the novels. Why? Because in those shots of Feuillade's, in which nothing is happening, something else enters in under cover of the inaction, the waiting, the suspense, the emptiness, the indefiniteness of the action. And that something is mystery. And how is mystery expressed? Through style. A film-maker is nothing without style. Feuillade had it. Hitchcock had it. What poetry and charm there are in Feuillade's films! Yet he wasn't striving for this poetry. He wasn't looking for it. The same for the inventor of motion pictures, Louis Lumière. His films had no intention of being poetic, but they are.

Can you discuss the relationship among style, mystery, and melodrama? Do you find melodrama in Feuillade?

Feuillade's theme is always melodramatic. His *Judex* is absolutely melodramatic—the theme is family relations. In my *Judex*, the theme isn't melodramatic at all. It's magic, and magic alone. Judex appears out of the blue. We don't know his past. In Feuillade's *Judex*, this is all explained.

Here's Feuillade's plot. Judex's father is a

banker and his partner is the villain Favraux. This character has been swindling him and tries to seduce Judex's mother. She is a moral woman, of course—she's a Corsican!—she turns Favraux down, and in revenge the villain ruins her husband and drives him to suicide. So the mother summons her two sons—Judex is the intellectual and his brother is the athletic type—ah, this is melodrama, real melodrama! She makes them swear over their father's body that they will avenge her and punish Favraux. All this is in Feuillade's film. It motivates the plot, in which Judex *and* his mother go after Favraux. In my version, I threw out the whole family history, eliminated the brother, and put Judex in by himself. Judex became a magical character. He had only to appear and justice was done!

You know, *Judex* is the only film of Feuillade's that isn't good. Because it has all this stuff in it.

I've seen episodes of Fantômas, *but never the original* Judex.

You haven't missed anything, really.

With the demise of melodrama on stage, did its spirit take refuge in the movies? In the popular movies of earlier times, anyway?

In all movies. The minute you've got a love story, you've got a melodrama. As soon as a film aims for our feelings, it's melodrama. Chaplin was the greatest. All of Chaplin is melodramatic. And Griffith's big films . . .

You once described melodrama as a mixture of emotion and irony.

Well, I really can't imagine melodrama if there isn't humor. It would be deadly without it. You know, you never have as many laughs as when you're writing a horror script. Oh, yes! Not that you're trying for laughs, obviously. But the disproportion alone is enough to tickle you. It happened to me writing *Eyes Without a Face.* The sight of Pierre Brasseur getting eaten by his dogs . . . It's a kind of revenge.

How did *you write* Eyes Without a Face, *anyway?*

It has no relation to its original, which was a scenario by Jean Redon and Claude Sautet. The mad doctor was a drunk and his assistant was a madman who was on drugs and raped the corpses. The doctor got arrested at the end and his daughter committed suicide at the sight of her father in handcuffs. It was too dumb for words.

I gave it the ending it has now. I created the

EYES WITHOUT A FACE: *Edith Scob and Alida Valli.*

part of the woman assistant and cast Alida Valli in it. I had my friends Boileau and Narcejac collaborate on the screenplay, because they were the first writers in the history of crime fiction to emphasize the victim rather than the cops (as originally with Lecoq or Sherlock Holmes) or the robbers (as with the next generation—Fantômas and Arsène Lupin) or the gangster (as in later American fiction.[6] And I wanted the star of this film to be Edith Scob—the victim. What she brought to it was magic. She always does. It had been a comic story before, with Brasseur. Full of laughs. Now it became sentimental, melodramatic.

On the subject of subverting melodrama, you once wrote that while it isn't usually feasible to turn a humorous scene into a tragedy, it's possible to take a tragic scene and turn it into something suddenly funny.

That refers to something rarer—black humor. Black humor starts from tragedy, always. From the black.

In your fiction films, you've always sought to create a relationship between black humor and melodrama. Will you define your idea of melodrama more exactly?

The concept of melodrama is purely affective. It is sentimental, emotional. That is its sole basis. But I refuse to believe that melodrama aims at our better feelings, as they're called. I don't believe in the better feelings. I might believe in purity, but never in innocence. If I show you Fleur de Misère and you feel an urge to protect her, it's because she's pretty, isn't it? You wouldn't want to protect her if she were ugly. That's melodrama—the pretty, soft, sweet, weak victim . . . Our desire to protect the victim conceals another desire—to possess her. And this urge to possess her isn't just sentimental, it's sexual. And that's the hypocrisy of melodrama.

We also ignore the fact that there are two supposedly impure notions that enter into every bond of love or erotic attraction throughout all literature, sentimental or not: money and notoriety. We're not supposed to talk about them. Yet money is erotic. Notoriety is erotic. One doesn't talk about the eroticism in sentiment. But it's all bound up together. And melodrama is made of all this.

Melodrama consists in giving people the sense of drama—making them want a drama to happen. And as soon as we want a drama, where have our better feelings gone? As soon as we want to protect the unfortunate heroine, we must first want her to be unfortunate. What becomes of our better feelings? That's why I say melodrama is utter hypocrisy.

But I also say that melodrama has its truth. In *The Last Melodrama,* Fleur de Misère is waiting for the doctor. A man enters. In the audience, a woman whispers to herself, "That's not the doctor!" She's right! It's the landlord. She's afraid! This is the opposite of the theater of distance. Melodrama brings us as close as possible. It was popular because it was sentimental, and public. And it ceased to exist when people began referring to playwrights instead of plays—when theater was considered as literature first and drama only second. Of course you can make a melodrama out of Victor Hugo, but the point is that it isn't Victor Hugo any more. Melodrama is a completely separate type of theater, having no significant reference to literature. It has no style. It's the most realistic, popular theater possible. You could almost say it's the theater of life.

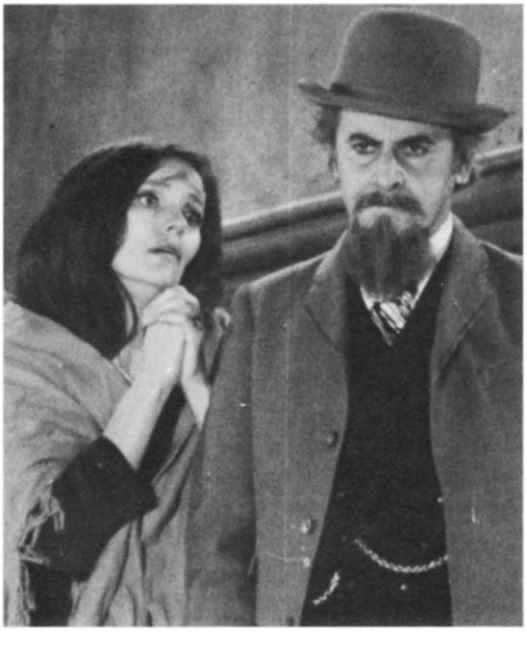
When something happens in real life, we call it drama. Stage it, and it's called melodrama. Take a guy who loses his bicycle . . . Or take a girl. She's an unmarried mother, abandoned by her boyfriend. She's on the street. She becomes a whore. She looks for work, can't find any. Maybe she has an accident, can't work the streets any more. Maybe she kills herself. It's drama. On stage—performed as a spectacle—it becomes melodrama.

Melodrama is not *theatrical* theater. Brecht's is a theater of masks, a theater of style. Ionesco too is essentially intellectual, not affective. Even Racine is not affective, he doesn't touch our feelings. Only one type of theater touches our feelings, and that's melodrama. I think melodrama is unique and it's a shame to lose it.

Yet melodrama is being rejected, and so are the affective elements in the other arts. Literature is so boring today because it has rejected psychology, which is what made literature seductive. Now they write about an ash tray for 300 pages. That's not public! One edition of a book today reaches only 5000 people, and what is that compared with the millions who are to be reached? And these authors get famous on their 5000 copies. But in theater, you have to reach many more.

And modern music does without melody, harmony, classical composition—the things that made it seductive. Now they make music without using instruments. Nobody can listen to it. It's total decadence! Beethoven and

Edith Scob and Michel Vitold performing the melodrama FLEUR DE MISERE *in Franju's* THE LAST MELODRAMA.



Mozart are more divine than ever—and no wonder. It's a lucky thing films are still made with cameras! That's what saves us.

In the first part of The Last Melodrama, *you seem to be saying that melodrama has lost touch with people because television has taken over.*

Some townspeople say so during the intermissions. It's true enough. Television has brought quite a few changes, after all.

I thought you might have put in those lines because you work in television yourself now.

No, not at all. I only intended it as a realistic touch in the scene. It's a commonplace that we live in the television era, it's just something people say, that's all. Just as people complain that we put men on the moon but we haven't cured rheumatism. It's insane, but it's true.

If TV hasn't corrupted the villagers' sensitivity to melodrama in the opening scenes of your film, what has?

Melodrama flourished in an era of happiness, at the turn of the century. It introduced a sense of misfortune in a happy period. Today we no longer live in a happy period, and people's needs are different. They want comedies, which are very popular right now, and they also want disaster films, which are dramatic but not disturbing, because the disasters obviously will never really happen. Even war appears fictional, that is, imaginary. If you showed war as it would really happen to us, people would hate it. So I think the difficulty people have with melodrama is that they find it too ordinary.

You've inserted performances of melodramas in The Last Melodrama. *But they came across to me as bits and pieces. If melodrama takes time to get used to, why didn't you show one melodrama, say, more extensively?*

I didn't have the time. Besides, I had to show several plays—those actors used to put on a different show every night. Anyway, I worked each one into the plot of the film. For instance when they do *Les Misérables,* the spectators react. They yell at the actors, Larémolière insults them back, they call for their money back, people get kicked out. The scene plays back and forth between the house and the stage. And this advances the action in the film. And towards the end, I had them do *Lucrèce Borgia* because of the way the villagers would react—taking offense at the actors' disrespect for the pope and so forth. What was on stage had repercussions in the whole story.

The scene from *Fleur de Misère,* on the other hand, is more self-contained. Yet even this one plays back and forth with the audience. I cut to the woman who's so caught up in the play that she whispers "that's not the doctor," the woman who thinks she recognizes the child actor as the thief who stole wine from her shop that afternoon . . .

You described Thérèse Desqueyroux as hav-

Michel Vitold and Emmanuel Galiero in Franju's The Last Melodrama

ing two identities. In The Last Melodrama, *it feels like the barman's wife Maria is the same way.*

She's married to the barkeeper, but she really wants to be in theater. She's a bit special, even though she's also a bit coarse. It's just because she's somewhat different that she wants to get the hell out of there. One viewer asked me if she was really typical, since she's so attractive. You see good-looking women in the provincial cafes quite often—it doesn't mean they were above marrying the barman! I suppose Maria knew this guy, married him and got where she is. After all, better to be running this place than maybe be a whore in some other bar. By the same token, though, she tells herself, "I'm better than all this, I want to run away." But the actors won't take her.

So she destroys the troupe.

After they've refused her, there's still one part she can play in this story. She sets the fire and destroys Larémolière's theater.

In fact the people of the village have created their own melodrama.

When Ionesco saw *The Last Melodrama* he said to me, "You show melodramas, but the film itself is a tragedy." It's true, the story of Larémolière's troupe is a tragedy.

It's a beautiful film. Would you describe the other films you've done for television?

Some weren't so important. But *White Curtains* was an adaptation of Marguerite Duras for German television. But Duras is very subtle, it would be hard for me just to tell you the plot. One story I loved doing was *The Shadow Line* by Joseph Conrad, a great poet. I discovered Conrad only a few years ago. I knew other English-language writers—Joyce, and James—but Conrad is sublime.

I did *The Shadow Line* for television. Most sea movies are action films, but *The Shadow Line* is an inaction film. It's a contemplative film. The ship won't move, and cholera breaks out on board. The ship I used was a two-master, a brig from Conrad's era. I've never sailed, and I hate to travel. The roadstead of Singapore was faked in Villefranche, and the roadstead of Bangkok in Nice. Better yet, for the Bangkok harbor we shot in the Bercy region of Paris—where Feuillade shot *Fantômas*. And it's perfect—you'd think you were really in Malaysia in Conrad's day.

Curiously, when it was shown on television I received a note from Marguerite Duras saying she liked it, which hadn't happened with *White Curtains*. There is a kinship between Conrad and Duras, whose writing is very feminine, full of sensuality. Both have mystery.

[*Translated by Randall Conrad*]

NOTES
[by R.C.]

1. Quoted from an interview by Claude Beylie, *Ecran '78*, no. 75 (December 1978). Jean Vilar, the actor-director, originated the Avignon Festival in 1947 and pursued his modernizing influence on contemporary French theater by assuming direction of the Théâtre National Populaire in 1951. As it happens, this company and the festival are the subject of a 1956 documentary by Franju.
2. Cocteau gave Franju the rights in 1952, when *Hôtel des Invalides* was new. He died in 1963, a year before the film was finally in production.
3. Superimposed upon the last part of *Judex*'s romantic final long shot showing Edith Scob and her rescuer walking arm in arm along the shore away from us, is the title: "In remembrance of an unhappy time—1914." Then an iris-in emphasizes that date, and a discordance in Maurice Jarre's finale underscores Franju's emphasis.
4. Eugène Ionesco needs no introduction. Georges Pérec is a writer of novels (*La vie—mode d'emploi* won the Prix Médicis in 1978), plays, and recently screenplays (Alain Corneau's *Série Noire*, 1980). "Chase"—if that is indeed the name Franju pronounced on my tape recording—could only mean James Hadley Chase, writer of more than 80 novels of crime and violence beginning with *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* (1939). His real name is René Raymond and he is an Englishman living on the continent.
5. A selection of episodes from Louis Feuillade's *Fantômas* (1913-1914) (but not *Judex*, 1916-1917), including the adventure as Berey which Franju recalls elsewhere in this interview, is distributed by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, New York.
6. For Franju, Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac wrote *Pleins feux sur l'assassin* as well as *Les yeux sans visage*. Prior to that, the first two novels the team wrote had become Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1954) and Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958).

FILMOGRAPHY

Born in Brittany in 1912, Georges Franju studied stage design and prepared sets for the Folies Bergères and the Casino de Paris. With his friend Henri Langlois, Franju co-directed a short film (*Le Métro*) in 1934 and co-founded the Cinémathèque Française in 1937. His celebrated short documentaries (1949-1958) seem to foreshadow a quite contemporary

consciousness of our social ills (notably the nuclear threat, ecological damage and industrial hazards). His first films are contemporaneous with those of such modern innovators as Rouch and Resnais. In spite of all this, Franju is a classical artist; it is as if he prefers to walk in the company of the "unselfconscious" film poets — Feuillade, Zecca, Lumière—whose work he loves and has labored to preserve archivally. One of his most touching early films is *Le Grand Méliès*, an acted and narrated biography (documentary drama, in today's idiom) of the screen's great magician.

1949: *Le Sang des bêtes* (short)
1950: *En Passant par la Lorraine* (short)
1951: *Hôtel des Invalides* (short)
1952: *Le Grand Méliès* (short)
1953: *Monsieur et Madame Curie* (short)
1954: *Les Poussières* (short)
Navigation Marchande (short)
1955: *A Propos d'une Rivière* (short)
Mon Chien (short)
1956: *Le Théâtre National Populaire* (short)
Sur le Pont d'Avignon (short)
1957: *Notre Dame, Cathédrale de Paris* (short)
1958: *La Première nuit* (fiction short)
1958: *La Tête contre les murs* (Head Against the Wall)
1959: *Les Yeux sans visage* (Eyes Without a Face)
1960: *Pleins Feux sur l'assassin* (Open Fire on the Killer)
1962: *Thérèse Desqueyroux*
1963: *Judex*
1964: *Thomas l'imposteur* (Thomas the Impostor)
1965: *Les Rideaux blancs* (White Curtains; TV film)
1966: *Marcel Allain* (TV film)
1970: *La Faute de L'Abbé Mouret* (The Sin of Father Mouret)
1971: *La Ligne d'ombre (The Shadow Line;* TV film)
1974: *Nuits rouges* (TV series)
L'Homme sans visage (The Man Without a Face)
1978: *Le Dernier mélodrame* (The Last Melodrama; TV film)

Reviews

LILI MARLEEN

Director: Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Script: Manfred Pursner, based on **Der Himmel Hat Viele Farben**, by Lale Andersen. Photography: Xavier Schwarzenberger.

Putting despair behind him, Rainer Werner Fassbinder has once again addressed an international audience with a swaggering reprise of the nostalgic "Lili Marleen." As if not yet enough swastikas had staked their claim on our sense of history, we must watch a German director yet again wrestle with this incontrovertible past, this time with the biggest budget in German post-war film history. But *Lili Marleen* deserves a niche in that history as full of light and shadow, of melodrama and passion, of cabaret and opera as any swastika flick by Visconti, Liliana Cavani, or Leni herself.

Fassbinder renders "Lili Marleen" a metaphor of the war, or perhaps *vice versa*. There is such a luxuriating in images, and of course, imagery that it is impossible on the first viewing to sort out Fassbinder's war from that of the Third Reich, or Fassbinder's chanteuse from the two women who came to represent "Lili" to that distraught world—Lale Andersen to the Axis, Marlene Dietrich to the Allies. Perhaps it is not blasphemous or premature to say that Hanna Schygulla is to Fassbinder what Dietrich was to von Sternberg. Certainly a film with such a title is bound to inspire the comparison. This film is ultimately about a song, however, not the singer, and Fassbinder's tendency to let his themes eclipse his actors is the trait that keeps us ever watchful for the message behind the melodrama. This time, the production put one over on Fassbinder.

In *Lili Marleen*, Fassbinder gives us to understand that Lale Andersen sold her soul for a song. In an official statement, Fassbinder himself best explained how and why he made this film, a matter of no small controversy in Germany where the auteur theory is an ideology bordering on theology among directors themselves. It would seem that Fassbinder compromised himself by going into cahoots with a rich (by German standards) and therefore corrupt (ditto) producer whose pet project it had been. "Even if in the beginning Luggi Waldleitner had only had the title 'Lili Marleen' and the song, another dimension was added with the life of Lale Andersen; in fact, three dimensions. First, such a great love story between two people which is the great love of their lives only because it does not take place and cannot take place, since the two of them are separated. One of them is a Swiss Jew working for the Hagana, while the other sere-

consciousness of our social ills (notably the nuclear threat, ecological damage and industrial hazards). His first films are contemporaneous with those of such modern innovators as Rouch and Resnais. In spite of all this, Franju is a classical artist; it is as if he prefers to walk in the company of the "unselfconscious" film poets — Feuillade, Zecca, Lumière—whose work he loves and has labored to preserve archivally. One of his most touching early films is *Le Grand Méliès*, an acted and narrated biography (documentary drama, in today's idiom) of the screen's great magician.

1949: *Le Sang des bêtes* (short)
1950: *En Passant par la Lorraine* (short)
1951: *Hôtel des Invalides* (short)
1952: *Le Grand Méliès* (short)
1953: *Monsieur et Madame Curie* (short)
1954: *Les Poussières* (short)
Navigation Marchande (short)
1955: *A Propos d'une Rivière* (short)
Mon Chien (short)
1956: *Le Théâtre National Populaire* (short)
Sur le Pont d'Avignon (short)
1957: *Notre Dame, Cathédrale de Paris* (short)
1958: *La Première nuit* (fiction short)
1958: *La Tête contre les murs* (Head Against the Wall)
1959: *Les Yeux sans visage* (Eyes Without a Face)
1960: *Pleins Feux sur l'assassin* (Open Fire on the Killer)
1962: *Thérèse Desqueyroux*
1963: *Judex*
1964: *Thomas l'imposteur* (Thomas the Impostor)
1965: *Les Rideaux blancs* (White Curtains; TV film)
1966: *Marcel Allain* (TV film)
1970: *La Faute de L'Abbé Mouret* (The Sin of Father Mouret)
1971: *La Ligne d'ombre (The Shadow Line;* TV film)
1974: *Nuits rouges* (TV series)
L'Homme sans visage (The Man Without a Face)
1978: *Le Dernier mélodrame* (The Last Melodrama; TV film)

Reviews

LILI MARLEEN

Director: Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Script: Manfred Pursner, based on **Der Himmel Hat Viele Farben**, by Lale Andersen. Photography: Xavier Schwarzenberger.

Putting despair behind him, Rainer Werner Fassbinder has once again addressed an international audience with a swaggering reprise of the nostalgic "Lili Marleen." As if not yet enough swastikas had staked their claim on our sense of history, we must watch a German director yet again wrestle with this incontrovertible past, this time with the biggest budget in German post-war film history. But *Lili Marleen* deserves a niche in that history as full of light and shadow, of melodrama and passion, of cabaret and opera as any swastika flick by Visconti, Liliana Cavani, or Leni herself.

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nades Nazi Germany. Therefore, this love functions only because it never happens, and that is the kind of thing I'm interested in. The second dimension is the matter of understanding that, even within the Nazi regime or any such regime anywhere, someone can desire to survive; it is too complex to be simply a sympathizer or a dupe. She is quite conscious of her will to survive there. The third dimension is that even in such a regime, someone who considers himself an artist wants to pursue a career. These are all matters related to the things I have done before—at least, sufficiently so that nobody can claim *Lili Marleen* is something entirely strange, something totally different. Sufficient for me to say, 'Yea, I'll do it.'"

A writer and director closely associated with producer Waldleitner, Manfred Purzer, then wrote a script from the book *Der Himmel hat Viele Farben* (The Sky has Many Colors, or more loosely, Heaven is Motley), an autobiography of Lale Andersen (quite probably ghost-written, for it has a literary touch). The historical momentum of the rise of Nazi Germany creates a deadlock between Robert, a musician, and Willie, a singer, in Switzerland. His family is exceedingly wealthy and involved in bringing Jews out of Germany, while her origins are considerably humbler and therefore an embarrassment to Robert's family, except for the odd occasion when she can be useful to their organization, as her connections improve and her travel broadens its range. The war, in combination with the overnight success of a song Willie once recorded, causes their careers to veer off in different directions, until the collapse of the Reich. Then, Willie is reduced to waiting in the wings while the heroic but now distant Robert Mendelson conducts. She believes he will come off stage into her arms. He doesn't.

It is a simple love story existing outside and apart from the song and not star-crossed so much as war-crossed. It is the comparable simplicity of the song which allows Fassbinder to achieve a grotesque but fascinating baroque aesthetic of war surrounding an insubstantial song and its song-bird Lale. His approach to her singing the Nazi swan-song frames it between two other types of performance. Schygulla's first number, in English, is a lighthearted "Gotta Brand New Guy"—clever enough to be descended from *Cabaret* and naughty-but-nice enough to be an homage to Marilyn Monroe, whose singing talent likewise was not rooted in her vocal chords. Schygulla's

presence in these scenes is enough to make one think the film is good; she enters a spacious salon from a far door, teasingly to greet her lover at the keyboard, and she can fill up that glamorous emptiness until her arms twine around his neck. It's a hackneyed sequence, but it takes flight, borne on the beautiful shoulders of Schygulla. Fassbinder is good at tapping actors for moods to match messages he himself controls rather clumsily in his own scenarios. There is no message in this 40-years-too-late musical, but Hanna Schygulla's malleability and agility have a sex appeal that strikes the same chord as "Lili Marleen."

It takes Fassbinderian logic to cast Giancarlo Gianinni as the Teutonic Mendelson and a Fassbinderian perversity to want to rivet our attention on Gianinni's bleached hair. Is this done to discredit him as a character in the interest of some supposed larger world-view? Is Mendelson supposed to be a phony? The further irritation of Gianinni's lines being out of synch would seem to reinforce this otherwise tendentious interpretation. Why not Matthieu Carrier or Daniel Olbrychski for the role? It is just as difficult to understand why Willie loves Gianinni as it would have been had Klaus Kinski kinked up the role a bit. Mel Ferrer as Robert's father is the only really threatening figure in the film; the Nazis, by comparison, are marshmallows. In a scene with Schygulla, Ferrer sweeps down the staircase of the opulent Mendelson realm, like an eagle upon a hare, and then dismisses her witheringly, leaving her as open game for the Nazis.

Because Fassbinder is recreating certain disputable facts in this story, he seems to be taking even more liberty than usual with his visual pyrotechnics. Xavier Schwarzenberger's cinematography lends his artistry even more license than usual, and the sets built by Rolf Zehetbauer, who also designed *Cabaret*, accent the profligacy of both Jews and Germans. Whenever possible, action takes place behind a pane or within a mirror—nothing new in and of itself—but critics are prone to see through Fassbinder's viewfinder an attempt to say, "This is all twice-told, mere reflection!" The heart of the problem is that with each retelling, the twice-told Nazi horror stories get more rational, and more reflection seems to mean more glitter, glamor, gloss. The flashy wardrobes, Art-Deco interiors, and tinsel music of the opening sequences seem to promise a feather-weight film, but as the uniforms line up and the banners wave to fully orchestrated dirges, one begins to see how Fassfinder has used the dim lighting before the Third Reich peaked and the flood lights afterward until he reaches a simplicity of vision defied only by the insurmountable fact of what the images represent.

It is a droll idea to make a film about a song, and few songs exist which could sustain the burden. Certainly to Western Civilization no other German song has the cutting edge of "Lili Marleen"—unless it be "Mack the Knife." The life and destiny of a song from those fate-charged years can, in fact, sustain a story, and Fassbinder brings to it nothing less than a heroic development that hasn't been seen since Leni's *Triumph*. The heroine Willie—named from Wilke, Lale Andersen's sobriquet—is not so much a tragic success as an opportunistic failure. She is, nevertheless, a victim of her song. So are we, on the fifteenth repetition, but with it, Fassbinder drives home the boredom of battle so futilely fought. Willie often seems to be a stolid little German soldier, dutifully chanting her phrases.

Because the progression, so as not to say plot, of the film depends undoubtedly on an understanding of the lyrics, I offer a translation here which attempts to be so faithful that it even renders the German doggerel, reducing it probably to a thin broth, souped up, as it were, by my singular attempt to retain rhythm and rhyme (pace Schultze & Leip). (A slight excess will be noticed in the refrain, done in order to capture the ultimate and nostalgic importance of that German "wie einst" which everyone remembers; old soldiers never die, they just sing "Lili Marleen.")

Beyond the barracks, by the entry gate,
There stood a street light—stands as if to wait
For you and I again to meet
Under the lantern on that street,
Like times gone by, Lili,
Gone by, Lili Marleen.

Our two shadows looked like a single shadow there,
Anyone could see how much we both did care.
And one and all should surely know
When we're beneath that street light's glow,

Like times gone by, Lili,
Gone by, Lili Marleen.

The sentry has called out. They're playing taps so loud.
This could cost me three days. I'm coming, Comrade, now.
And there we had to bid adieu,
I much preferred to go with you,
With you, Lili Marleen,
With you, Lili Marleen.

Out of the earthly soil, out of the silent realm,
Your loving mouth could lift me, as if in a dream.
And late—when the fog is rolling in,
I'll stand beneath the lamp again,
Like times gone by, Lili,
Gone by, Lili Marleen.

There is a morbid fatalism lurking in these lyrics which provides the foundation for the two issues the film addresses—Lale Andersen's doomed love-affair and the Nazi propaganda effort to sustain a war with a song. The truth of Andersen's account in her autobiography, as reshaped by Manfred Purzer, in conjunction with Fassbinder's meditation on the soldier's long goodbye, is still tangled in a cocoon of myth, which is what the film's appeal is all about. We seem to be witnessing one more bizarre occurrence, not that different from anything else that occurred in that misbegotten era. Lale's Lili is spell-binding.

As Wilde insisted that life imitates art, so with these lyrics and events, Fassbinder illustrates how history imitates propaganda. Caught between the two fronts of love story and war story, Fassbinder proves more adept at building up the energy, conflict and character of individual destinies than a portrait of a nation marching to its fate. As Lale serenades the troops, Fassbinder cuts in images of battle scenes—rockets' red glare, bombs bursting in air, only to descend as flowers cast at the feet of Willie on stage preforming her song. This montage is undoubtedly daring, alternating with "battlegrounds" to illustrate her target audience. Count on Fassbinder to do the unexpected: the battles are static, little more than sound-and-light tableaux, so obviously shot in the studio that one fears he is trying, like Syberberg, to evoke the UFA archetypal memory rather than to recreate history. Just as a body-count in an epic would be meaningless, so the repetition of the song becomes absurd, ushering the Germans into the hell of 1945 like a music-box accompaniment to an eternally dying warrior.

From the drunken merriment of Lale and her accompanist companion Taschner (Hark Bohm in his usual hang-dog mien), after they are embraced by the Nazi party and given luxurious quarters, the song slowly wilts through her rote recital unto the inevitable suicide attempt, made by every woman on a one-trick pony. Fassbinder manages to equate her suicide with that of the Third Reich, and by the time they have both been resuscitated enough for a grand-standing finale (envision swastikas, torches, and goose-steps *heil*ing Hitler!), we understand all too clearly that Lale is another cog in the war machine, even if she thinks she is sabotaging them by collecting atrocity stories on concert tours. Hanna Schygulla got up by a taxidermist in full Nazi regalia, helmeted coiffure and bullet-sheathed body, is no longer recognizable as the charming songstress. In contrast to the original disembodied voice of Radio Belgrade, she is now an occultist illusion of an impotent propaganda ministry.

The slow build-up of points of light as Willie moves toward the culmination of her career is one of the more obvious directorial tricks in Fassbinder's sleeve, but this is not to say it is not effective. Light and shadow menace her upward struggle, but limelight is clearly the name of this game, and never more clearly than when Willie is escorted into the office of the Führer himself, and the doorway swallows her in a blaze of light not seen since Charlton Heston descended de Mille's mountain. Long descriptions of the opulence and decadence which Fassbinder equates with the Third Reich can neither exalt the film nor diminish our distrust of Fassbinder's own chameleon nature. This time, he seems to have slavishly imitated the illusions of grandeur which the Nazis themselves so slavishly imitated from their Wagnerian conceptions of their historical forebears. Ultimately, the critic forbears and hopes Fassbinder at least had fun revivifying the Nuremberg rallies.

By shredding the song into snatches, Fassbinder dismantles Lale's success, until her final whispered lyrics annihilate it, in clear musical counterpoint to the full orchestra

which Mendelson is conducting in the final sequence, an example of Germany's other great tradition—the humanism and true tragedy of a Beethoven symphony. Poor Lale, who always dominated center stage, has been squeezed into the wings for a tear-jerker ending. She and her song have lost their credibility, gone the way of lost wars and ephemeral pop culture, while the ex-lover conducts legitimate art back into the forum. Because Gianinni is so unattractive, we're almost sorry the war is over, but the melody of "Lili" stays with you, like a jingle, jangling your nerves and your knee-jerk reactions to the film, perhaps the way the song triggered Churchill's objection, when years later a band struck up "Lili Marleen": ". . . too many ghosts, too many tears," he said.

Those who don't remember the original "Lili Marleen" have surely heard of its legendary existence and iconographic value in World War II. The Germans not only gave the world a war; they provided background music to fight it. It began as a German broadcast out of Belgrade to the soldiers in North Africa. Fassbinder manages to slip in how a Viennese ordinance officer demoted to the Belgrade outpost sorts through the official archive of records looking for something besides marches. Certain records are labelled, literally, "sociable," but not enough. The archivist throws in, for good measure, "Lili Marleen." Thus, Lale Andersen was launched overnight, even over the protests of the propaganda minister, who once shattered one of the two original pressings. And so came into being the unofficial anthem of the war.

The simple song's appeal was found "too sentimental" by Minister Goebbels, who banned it from the armed forces broadcasting stations, not once but twice! His original objection was dropped when Belgrade reported thousands of requests from Africa within a week. With troop morale at stake, a compromise was found whereby Belgrade would use Lale's Lili as a trademark or "taps" to conclude their broadcast each night at 9:55, but Goebbels found the fourth verse "*macaber*" and not stern enough stuff for propaganda purposes (which Fassbinder twists into just another aspect of the minister's bad taste).

Of course it became an international hit and was almost immediately co-opted by the enemy's translators who wanted to use if for their own purposes. Tommie Connor explained his contract with the BBC in early 1942 to translate the song in such a way that any Tommy could appreciate "Lilli" as his daughter, mother, sister, or lover. Much the same was inflicted on the song in 26 other languages, so that each version reflects popular sentiments of that country at that time.

As early as 1944, *The True Story of Lilli Marlene* appeared, a British documentary, in which we discover that not all Allies were pleased with the idea of allowing an enemy song, in whatever guise, to follow the Union Jack, and *The Daily Herald* "promoted" Lili from simple maid to General, whose effect on England was equal to that of her colleague Rommel. A Swiss newspaper of the time analyzed her success with a perspicacious neutrality typical of the time: "The secret of the song's popularity—for to call it simply a hit reflects a dull ear and soul—lies undoubtedly in its internal purity which appeals particularly to the soldier defending himself against an inhumane mechanism, as one who has developed a heightened enigmatic sensibility. So have his contemporaries and comrades. Above and beyond all the razzle-dazzle, it unites people, a song unrivaled in world history." It remains to be seen whether the film can match that success; its style may be too baroque for the song.

Parade and fireworks aficionados will find a great deal of good film-making in *Lili Marleen*, technically and artistically. But Fassbinder's complex color schemes and symbolic imagery paradoxically constitute a banalization of what the Third Reich was all about. It was more sorrowful and more pitiful than this sad ditty that really only shows how culturally shallow Germany was (had to be?), to put up with such insufferable manipulation. The song that lost them the war also lost the film.

—KAREN JAEHNE

LIGHTNING OVER WATER

In 1979 Nicholas Ray died while making a film with Wim Wenders. The autobiographical film, *Lightning Over Water*, told the story of the older director facing death and the younger one coming to terms with mortality. It is Wenders's most complete statement on the subject of death, a recurrent theme in most of his films.

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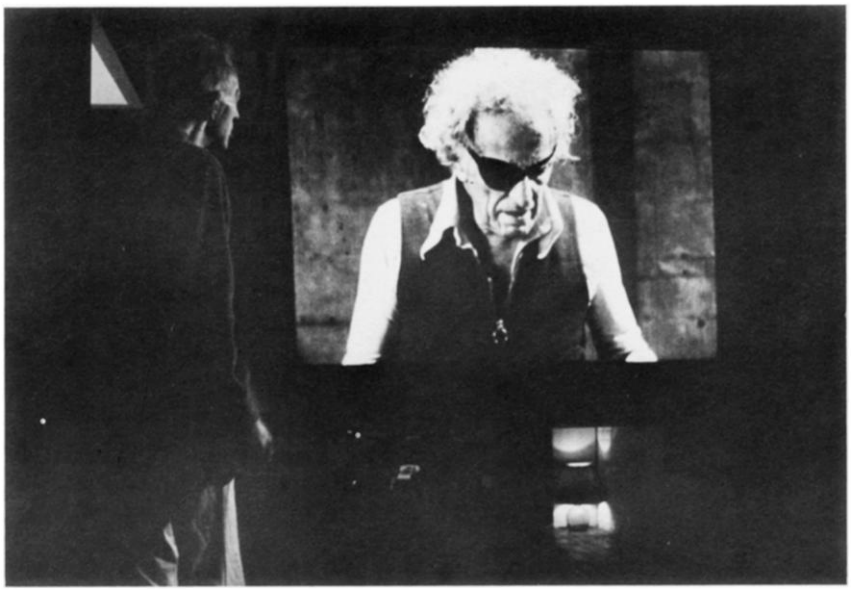

Nick Ray confronted with his own mortality: LIGHTNING OVER WATER

The film begins with a yellow taxi pulling up in front of a cast-iron frame building in lower Manhattan to the accompaniment of dissonant chords that set one's teeth on edge. It could be the shot that opened Wenders's seventh feature, *The American Friend,* from whose sound track the chords also derive. But instead of Dennis Hopper, Wim Wenders gets out of the cab. Wenders follows the same route that Hopper took in the previous film and climbs the stairs to Nicholas Ray's loft. In *American Friend* Ray played the aging painter Derwatt, who, supposed dead, forges his own paintings. In this film he plays himself: a once great film director fallen on hard times, dying of cancer. Wenders has come to make a film with Ray, to give the dying man a last opportunity to work, a last chance to "bring himself all together before he dies." Wenders and Ray discuss the film: the story, the actors, the title, for which Ray chooses *Lightning Over Water.* They decide to begin by filming Ray's upcoming lecture at Vassar, which is to follow a screening of his 1952 film *The Lusty Men.* After the lecture Wim looks at a video tape of Ray's speech which Tom Farrell, Ray's former student who follows him around with a video camera, has made. The two men watch Ray's ghostly form on the monitor while the red light from a neon sign outside throbs on and off like a heartbeat.

Later Ray shows his unfinished experiment with split-screen technique, *We Can't Go Home Again.* During the screening he gets up and, stooped and emaciated, stands watching his image, still strong and vibrant, on the screen. Director and crew are haunted by Ray's suffering. Wenders dreams that Tom Farrell tries to strangle him.

Wim is called back to Los Angeles where he is involved in pre-production work for *Hammett,* which he is directing for Francis Coppola. Before he leaves, Ray checks into the hospital. Wenders visits him and the faithful Tom records the sequence in video. Wenders leaves for Los Angeles taking Ray's diary of the last two years with him. Words from the diary appear across the screen as Wenders ponders the dying man's wisdom and courage. When Wim returns, Ray is rehearsing actor Gerry Bamman in Kafka's *Report to the Academy,* a satirical monologue in which an ape tells of his decision to join the human race. Later Wenders's wife Ronee Blakley and Ray rehearse a scene Ray has written based loosely on *King Lear.* Starkly symbolic, the set and costumes are white while a black cat sits beside Ray's hospital bed. Wenders watches them and dreams once more that he is on the bed. Ray sits beside him and complains. Finally he faces the camera and calls, "Cut!"

The film cuts to its Epilogue, Ray's wake, filmed and celebrated by the crew aboard a Chinese junk which had been procured at Ray's whim. On deck sits a Chinese urn containing Ray's ashes. "Nick's dying was his last directorial assertion," says one crew member. The film ends with a freeze frame: a long heli-

copter shot of the junk sailing in New York harbor, Manhattan in the background, and over it writing from Ray's diary,

> I looked into my face and what did I see? No granite rock of identity. Faded blue, drawn skin, and wrinkled lips. And sadness. And the wildest urge to recognize and accept the face of my mother.

More than most, *Lightning* is a film created in the cutting room.* In the course of shooting, the directors had little idea where they were going with the film largely because Ray was very feeble and could have died at any time. A wide variety of material was shot which ranged in technique from *cinéma vérité* to staged documentary to staged fiction. The assemblage of this material resulted less in a documentary than a personal testimony functioning on a principle of shifting levels of reality. The shots of the crew at work are the purest "reality," a constant reminder that we are "in the process of making a film," as Ray tells the Vassar audience. The conversations between Ray and Wenders, which form the core of the film, were scripted for the most part, and Wenders lets the audience know this when he misses a line and starts over.

In addition to the staged "reality" in and around Ray's loft and the sequences in which he lectures at Vassar and rehearses Gerry Bamman, there are the purely fictional sequences in which Ray and Ronee Blakley imitate King Lear and Cordelia and Wenders finds himself in the hospital bed. These fictional scenes jar because they draw so immediately on the reality of the situation and the fantasies of those involved and thus portray a subjective "reality."

Tom Farrell's video sequences punctuate the film, which cuts from Farrell taping to the taped sequences themselves, a shift from scripted shots to the purely spontaneous video. (The video was not originally intended for use in the final film.) The cuts from film to video emphasize the objective versus subjective tension underlying the film, the conflict between an objectively planned and executed shooting schedule and the live, personal drama which no shooting schedule could contain or control. When Wenders visits a cadaverous Ray in the hospital, a sequence shot only in video, the film probes nearest this subjective drama. Yet the slightly bizarre and ghostly video sequences, while in some sense more "real" than the film sequences, have an otherworldly quality that evokes the idea of a battle with death.

These varying levels of reality jostle one another throughout the film. For example one group of shots shifts from Wenders's dream that Tom Farrell is choking him, shot with film, to a video shot of the crew looking on, no longer so "real" as they appear on film but seeming to hover like accusing specters. The next shot, with film, is a slick and shiny Manhattan morning street with Wim and Tom, entirely friends, on their way to have breakfast. This sequence of shots illustrates the objective and subjective levels in the film as well as the role of the video in portraying, through the dematerializing effect of the electronic waves, its subjects as both more and less real than do the film sequences. Wenders's commentary serves to orient the viewer, who nevertheless must constantly readjust his sense of reality. Yet these shifting levels of reality prepare the viewer for the one, unstaged reality which ultimately determined the shape and ethos of the film, Ray's death. Death: objectively the most intransigent reality, subjectively unreal because totally unknown.

Ray never lived to see the junk though he had written scenes for it. A reminder of his last Hollywood film, *55 Days in Peking*, the boat appears at intervals throughout the film. Like a funeral barge, it suggests passage to another world. Ribbons of 35mm film stream from its bow and suggest Ray's immortality through his films and through this film. Yet in its wispy fragility the wind-blown film stock also images the frailty of human endeavor, like human life.

There are three major cutaways to the junk

*A first version of the film was edited by Peter Przygodda, cutter on all of Wenders's previous feature films, and shown in 1980 at the Cannes Film Festival where it won considerable acclaim. Extreme disjunctive editing and longer speeches, which tended toward obscurity, characterized this version and gave it a highly personal, ultimately morbid quality. On seeing the film Wenders, who had not helped with the cutting, felt it was not what he intended and began re-editing with production director Chris Sievernich in the summer of 1980. Sticking basically to Przygodda's chronology and choice of images, Wenders and Sievernich pared down the sequences to their essentials and thus shortened and clarified the film. They added Wenders's narrated explanation of each sequence, including the passages he quotes from Ray's diary. Greater emphasis was placed on Ray's wife, Susan, and a sequence indicating the difficulties Wenders had in accepting her was dropped.

within the main body of the film, and each extends our vision of Ray's death and Wenders's conception of it. Before the first cutaway Ray asks Wenders why he came, and Wenders replies that he wanted to talk to Ray. "About what?" asks Ray. "Dying?" An extreme long shot of othe junk, which becomes a very fast tracking and zoom shot, follows immediately, visually reiterating the sense of zooming in on death or confronting it directly that Ray's words evoke.

The second cutaway occurs during Gerry Bamman's Kafka performance. Stepping under a ladder intended to represent a cage, the ape-turned-human explains, "Freedom was not what I wanted, but a way out . . . out . . . out . . . OUT!" his volume increasing while he shakes the ladder violently. The junk appears in extreme long shot sailing under a bridge. The shot is quiet, no zoom; the bridge intensifies the idea of passage. As the ape stepped into humanhood as a way out, Ray steps into death. Yet the comparison between Ray and the humanized ape, together with the images of boat and bridge, implies that death is not the end, that Ray somehow transcends mortality as the ape transcended apehood.

The third cutaway begins the Epilogue and occurs after Ray has faced the camera and said, "Cut!" Once again the junk appears on a point of confrontation. Again the idea of passage is reinforced when the junk, photographed from directly above, an omniscient viewpoint, sails under a bridge.

The friendship between Ray and Wenders provides the film's *raison d'être*. Best remembered for *Johnny Guitar* (1954) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), Nicholas Ray directed twenty films in Hollywood in the late forties and fifties. Gifted, innovative, and successful, Ray nevertheless remained an outsider in Hollywood. The resulting tension resolved itself into alcoholism, and he left Hollywood. He spent most of the sixties in Europe, where French critics had lauded the artistry of his Hollywood films. He fashioned one project after another but completed none of them. In 1971 he went to Harpur College in Binghamton, New York, to teach film. There he began *We Can't Go Home Again* as a project with his students. Ever a rebel and an innovator, Ray remarks in *Lightning* about his still unfinished film, "I photographed and rephotographed—on

Wenders and Ray: friends at work

mirrors, on tin plates, on plexiglass . . . 35, 16, Super 16, Super 8, 8, video synthesizer. . . ." In the original version of *Lightning* he remarks that he dreamed for years of being able to destroy the rectangular frame. "I couldn't stand the formality of it." In 1974 he moved into the loft in Soho in which *Lightning* takes place and developed a workshop for actors and directors at New York University. In 1978 he was told he had cancer. In the same year Wenders came to America to work on *Hammett*. Ray wanted to begin a new film and talked to Wenders about his various projects, but Wenders doubted that Ray had the strength for such an undertaking. Eventually the two decided to make a film together, but instead of the fiction film originally intended, it became the story of their struggle to make a film in the face of Ray's imminent death. It was the tragically inconsequential nature of Ray's last two decades that made this last film so imperative to him and to Wenders, who, like the French critics-turned-directors before him, lionized Ray.

Wenders first met Ray in 1976 before beginning the location shooting in New York for *The American Friend*, and they became close friends. The character of Derwatt was Ray's idea, and he helped Wenders write it into the film. Even before this meeting, the influence of Ray could be seen in Wenders's films. In *Kings of the Road* the old house on the Rhine island in which Bruno grew up recalls the abandoned mansion in *Rebel Without a Cause*, its use dictated less by the logic of the story than Wenders's own fascination with decaying mansions and deserted places—a fascination shared with Ray. In the same sequence Bruno loosens a porch step and pulls out a tin of old comic books, reminiscent of a scene in *The Lusty Men* in which Robert Mitchum comes

back to his old home, slides underneath it, reaches under the floorboards and pulls out a gun and an old comic book.

Mitchum's dubious homecoming (in fact he, like Bruno, hasn't got a home anymore) is included in *Lightning*, and Wenders comments to Ray, "The scene when Mitchum comes back home—it's more about coming home than anything I've seen." Wenders shares his skepticism about home with Ray. "Identity [means] not having to have a home," he told Jan Dawson, while Ray's personal slogan (a line from *Johnny Guitar*) was "I'm a stranger here myself." At the same time a search for home goes on in Ray's films as in Wenders's, and its essence is expressed in Ray's diary when he writes of "the wildest urge to recognize and accept the face of my mother."

The search for home for these two is connected to the search for identity which underlies all of Wenders's feature films and dominated Ray's life. When James Dean died, Ray wrote: "Through a tragic irony, the escape that James Dean found was total and absolute. But he is mourned through the image of Jim Stark [*Rebel Without a Cause*], whose escape was the one he really hoped for, constantly searched for—a full, complete realization of self."* Logically the search for identity, for self-realization, is a major theme in *Lightning*. The transcendence which the visuals imply is linked not only to Ray's confrontation of death, but to his quest for self-realization.

"I have one action, which is to regain my self-image," Ray tells Wenders. "You have to select your own action."

"My action is going to be defined by yours," Wenders replies. Wenders leaves his identity open like the characters in his earlier films who discover their identities in the flux of travel or define them in terms of the needs and actions of their companions. Throughout the film Wenders's response counterpoints Ray's action. As Ray struggles to meet the demands of film-making, Wenders agonizes. "All I knew was that Nick was in immense pain, that it might be better to stop shooting but that nothing might be more painful for him than that," he says in the voice-over narration that accompanies the film. Ray's physical pain and vulnerability are mirrored in Wenders's psychic pain and vulnerability. He never frees himself from the fear that he is helping to kill Ray.

The first shot in *Lightning* is almost an exact replica of the first shot in *American Friend* and thus implies a connection between Dennis Hopper's character, Tom Ripley, and Wenders. Their actions bear this out. Ripley involves Jonathan, suffering from leukemia, in exploits which speed his death but at the same time bring him out of a deadening bourgeois domesticity to a new level of self-awareness. Likewise Wenders urges a dying man on an adventure of self-discovery. Yet the last clearly audible line in the Epilogue is Tom Farrell saying, "Would you kill someone for a great shot?" Ripley manipulates Jonathan, and Wenders is haunted by the fear that he may be using Ray.

Wenders cast film directors in all of the gangster roles in *American Friend* because, he said, they were closest to gangsters among practitioners of legitimate professions. The connection lies precisely in the element of manipulation. Jonathan is manipulated on screen by men paid to manipulate people "for great shots" off screen. Wenders cannot forget that he too is a director, and like Ripley, who is torn between self-interest and a growing affection for Jonathan, Wenders is torn between being a director and being a friend. "I was more and more under the pressure of making 'a movie' . . . preoccupied with the work itself . . . rather than being concerned with Nick." In the course of the Kafka sequence Wenders stresses the danger he posed for Ray by repeating the dissonant chords from *American Friend* when Ray notices him in the audience and turns to greet him.

The chords also recur while Wenders is reading from Ray's diary.* "Since what early age have I wanted to die?" he quotes Ray. "Perhaps not die but experience death? To experience death without dying seemed like a natural goal for me." Jonathan in *American Friend* shares Ray's fascination with death, his own to begin with, and the fascination eventually works itself out in murder. Murder gives him the only power he will ever have over life and death. As in Cocteau's *Orphée* death is sought for its power and mystery.

*John Francis Kreidl, *Nicholas Ray* (Boston, 1977), p. 73.

*This sequence also includes shots that are particularly Wendersian such as the silhouette of a man (Wenders) in the back of a car, a plane wing photographed from inside the plane, and aerial landscapes, as though Wenders were combining his signature with Ray's.

Wenders shares this fascination: accidental death, murder, attempted murder, suicide, and attempted suicide pepper his films. His experimental short, *Same Player Shoots Again* (1967) repeats a travelling shot of a wounded gangster five times. The idea was expanded in *Alabama* (1968), the highly stylized account of a young hoodlum sent by his gang to shoot an enemy. Wounded, the man returns to the gang's hangout to find his friends lying on the floor dead. He fumbles with the jukebox and, clutching his wound, moves through the bodies of his slain friends in a ritual-like death dance while Jimi Hendrix's singing blares out of the jukebox. As the man drives to an unknown destination, we see from his point of view through the front windshield. The aperture on the camera closes down until the screen is black except for a few flickering lights. It opens again, then closes down completely, indicating that the man is dead.

The death of this anonymous hero contrasts with the frequent suicides in Wenders films, which are often linked with suffocation. In *Wrong Move* the Industrialist, oppressed by loneliness, hangs himself. Ostensibly because he is redecorating, everything in his home is wrapped in plastic, a visual image of suffocation. In *Kings of the Road* a woman we never see commits suicide by driving into a tree, an image which indicates a *dead* end rather than a passage. She too suffered an overbearing sense of suffocation. Her husband explains: "We were in this hotel for a few days—a small village—she said, 'It stinks, the bed stinks, the washbasin stinks, the kitchen stinks, the lamp stinks,' then all of a sudden, the smell from the kitchen—she didn't want to go on." When Jonathan considers suicide in *American Friend*, he puts the gun to his head but first covers his head with a pillow, another visual image of suffocation. The linking of suicide and suffocation implies that these characters kill themselves because they cannot transcend the suffocating circumstances of their lives. There is no passage suggested here because there is no self-realization, only defeat.

In contrast both Jonathan and the hero of *Alabama* die while driving. (The woman in *Kings of the Road* dies after and because her car hits a tree.) Driving is Wenders's recurrent image for what is most sacred to him: travel, change, movement, and the possibility of self-discovery. These heroes die, but their cars keep moving, at least for a short time afterwards, and suggest a momentum which death does not stop, a confrontation instead of a capitulation, and, like the junk, a passage—reinforced in Jonathan's case by the fact that he dies by the sea. Their deaths are comparable to that of Ray, who confronts death, whose ashes are carried out to sea by the junk, and who has been implicitly compared to Jonathan because of Wenders's role as Ripley.

Each of these deaths characterized by confrontation and passage is accompanied by a dramatic reference to light. In *American Friend* there is a fiery explosion on the beach just prior to Jonathan's death. In *Alabama* a few lights continue to burn in the darkness until the aperture is closed completely while the sound track plays the Rolling Stones' "Carry the Lantern High." In the Epilogue to *Lightning* one of the crew members suggests burning down the junk and another, in response, holds up a lighted match in front of the camera, which records the flickering dying flame as it consumes the match stick. The light suggests self-realization, transcendence, and an immortal quality in the human spirit.

—KATHE GEIST

NOTE: *Lightning Over Water* is distributed by Gray City Films, 853 Broadway, New York, NY 10003, telephone (212) 473-3600.

THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN

Directed by Karel Reisz. Screenplay by Harold Pinter, from the novel by John Fowles. Photographed by Freddie Francis. Edited by John Bloom. Featuring Meryl Streep, Jeremy Irons, Lynsey Baxter, and Leo McKern. United Artists.

When John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* appeared in 1969, it was immediately recognized as one of the most unusual books of its time. Here was a novel which, to begin with, focused on a strangely tempestuous love story which had the bewitching power of a great Victorian romance. The story is, in fact, set in England during that period of time when the cross-tensions between traditional and revolutionary ways of thinking were being galvanized by such men as Darwin and Marx. Sarah, the "woman" of the title, represents the revolutionary urge in this scheme, and this is one reason why she is so fascinating to Charles, the male protagonist of the story. But she also embodies such other things as the mystery and

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unique attraction of her sex. Consequently, she enchants the man to the point where he begins to break free from the restrictions of his society and time. Whether he also wins her love is quite another matter. In the novel Fowles boldly offers one ending in which there is a happy resolution to this affair; and then he follows with another, quite tormenting ending which seems equally plausible. Thus it's finally left up to the reader to choose one or the other. More precisely, the ending is left to chance, and is loaded with an ambiguity which seems only proper as the final note of a story driven primarily by the idea of existential evolution.

All this is presented in an extraordinary fashion. Fowles's narrative voice is distinctly contemporary, so that there is a kind of double vision which allows us to constantly set the past century against our own. Moreover, the story isn't told by the objective, invisible narrator one usually finds in conventional modern novels. Instead, we have a highly self-conscious, active, almost aggressive figure who manipulates, tantalizes, and informs us at every turn. As a result, he becomes such a powerful presence as the story unfolds that, in time, we become conscious that *he* is perhaps the major character in this fiction, and that this novel is ultimately less about a story than about the magic of story-telling.

Because the novel is so self-consciously concerned with the abstractions of its medium, I admit to having had serious doubts that it would ever be successfully brought to the screen. I needn't have been so skeptical. The film version which has recently been released is so exceptional that it's bound to become a kind of classic in literature-to-film adaptations.

Some credit for this accomplishment must first of all go to Fowles himself for persisting in his belief that his novel could indeed be transformed into a movie if he could find the right person to do it. Even before the book was published, Fowles had started looking. The first person he approached was Karel Reisz, the Czech-born director who had made such successful British features as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *Morgan!* At that time, however, Reisz was so deeply involved in his own work on *Isadora* that he turned the offer down. Many years later, after several attempts by other film-makers to adapt the novel had failed, Fowles approached him again.

Once Reisz took control, he made several decisions which turned out to be crucial to the success of the project. He decided to cast Meryl Streep, although an American, in the role of Sarah, and Jeremy Irons, although a relatively inexperienced and unknown actor, opposite her. There is no denying that he was served well by both, as he was by a number of other collaborators. Of these, Freddie Francis the cinematographer, Carl Davis the music director, and Assheton Gorton the production designer might be cited for special praise. But Reisz's most fortunate decision was to bring in Harold Pinter as the screen writer.

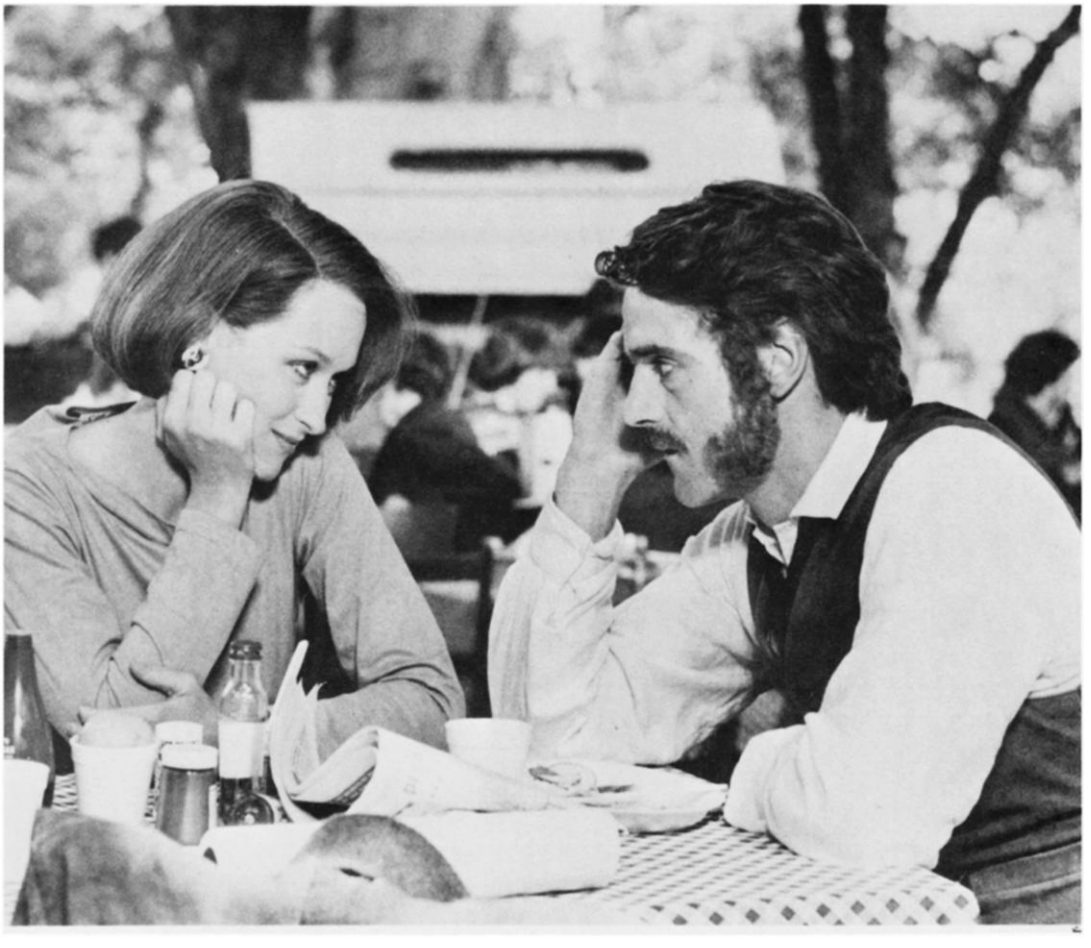
Before Pinter actually started on the script, he and Reisz sat down to a series of discussions as to how they might solve the paradox of being true to a novel which was exceedingly uncinematic. The solution they finally came up with seems perfect precisely because of its simplicity. Since Fowles's story is essentially a novel within a novel, their idea was to transform it into a movie within a movie.

Taking off from this idea, Pinter has written a script which retains much of the Sarah-Charles story line but which replaces the active, contemporary narrator with contemporary actors (Anna and Mike) who, while playing the roles of the protagonists in a movie entitled *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, carry on a love affair which parallels and intersects the affair of the couple they are playing. Of course, this scheme has its drawbacks. In replacing the erudite, discursive narrator of the novel, his many informative and speculative digressions will be missed. On the other hand, the tension between the companion love stories provides its own intriguing reward. If Fowles's narrator is capable of offering us his judgments, the film's double structure teases us into asking questions.

Questions about the nature of love, ego, fictional art, sexual mystery, and definitions of progress and evolution, for example, spring up. Also, the subject of what it means to be an alien arises prominently. This is to be expected, since Reisz, himself a refugee from his native land, had been obsessed with this question for a long time. In fact, this subject can be described as the primary theme in all of his previous features, since they all finally focused on romantic egoists who experienced some form of intense alienation. Sarah, quite obviously, can be seen as another such char-

acter, particularly in her urge to re-create herself into a self-conscious exile from her society. Yet it would be a mistake to believe that the essence of the film resides in this particular issue. Actually, the principal point, and ambiguity, of this film revolves less around the character of Sarah than around the question of what the two love stories have to do with each other.

Since the movie is structured in a chronological order, it might at first appear that the modern parallel to the Sarah-Charles story is a conventional reflection of the changing attitudes toward sex and love. But on second thought, it becomes evident that there is an ironic tension at play here which forces us to finally focus on the male figures of the couples. In both affairs, the woman retains a mystery which ultimately can't be explained away. To put it another way, Meryl Streep in both roles is the consummate actress who retains the integrity of her feminine mystery. The males, however, both change. Charles undergoes a kind of sentimental learning process, until he is on the way to being a new, more imaginative man. Mike, on the other hand, becomes so involved with the actress playing opposite him that he is finally transfixed by the illusion that she and Sarah are the same. In both cases, the man has been transformed in a



fundamental way, and each time by the power and art of feminine feeling, mystery, and fiction.

Reisz and Pinter must have known that they were running a great risk in setting up such a structure. The very real danger of alienating or even losing the audience was there. To avoid this, the film is organized in such a way that it builds from one integral scene to the next. These, in turn, are connected through an editing strategy which Reisz devised to be both functional and reflective of the subject matter. As one part leaps to the next, Reisz injects some form of visual or aural transition which at first links them. Sometimes, for example, he joins scenes which take place in different centuries by placing them in the same setting or by focusing the camera on objects or details which immediately tell us that we are in this or the past century. At other times, he joins such scenes by overlapping the romantic theme music as we are about to return to the Victorian affair from the present or by overlapping sound effects common to this century (cars, phones) as we are about to enter a scene focusing on the contemporary story. But while this form of transition links the scenes, something about the adjoining parts also tends to clash. Most obviously, there are the instances when the picture jumps from Meryl Streep playing up Sarah's romantic intensity to scenes in which she exhibits Anna in dispassionate or coy moods. Because of this kind of structural mixture, an ironic, perhaps even paradoxical, resonance is eventually created. But this is part of the fun of the movie, and also part of the point both of the book and the adaptation. It teases us to entertain, but also to create the feeling of uncertainty, of the free fall, which the male protagonists must undergo.

At this point it should be emphasized that (like the novel) this film sets out to have a double reaction from us in the end. Reisz and Pinter have tried, first of all, for a presentation which is clear and direct enough so that we might be emotionally involved in the romantic fiction. At the same time, they want the audience, if possible, to undergo something similar to the ambivalent, existential experiences of Charles and Mike. That this must actually have been on their minds is most forcefully revealed by the opening and closing scenes of the picture.

The film begins by showing us a film crew busy setting up a shot against the backdrop of Lyme Bay, the primary setting of Fowles's story. Then a clapper board appears before the camera eye, and suddenly we are thrust into the enactment of a film with the title of the original source. The camera tracks Meryl Streep as she walks toward a serpentine sea wall, the place where she will turn to look at the Charles character in such a way as to unsettle his life forever. What happens to us,

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Editor's Notebook, continued:

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BRUCE AUSTIN teaches at Rochester Institute of Technology; his co-author Mark Nicolich is a statistician, and co-author Thomas Simonet teaches at Rider College. RANDALL CONRAD co-directed *The Dozens*, an independent feature which premiered at the 1980 London Festival. GEORG GASTON teaches at Appalachian State University and has published books on Karel Reisz and Jack Clayton. KATHE GEIST is writing her doctorial dessertation on Wim Wenders. PETER HARCOURT teaches at Carleton University in Ottawa; he wrote *Six European Directors*. BRIAN HENDERSON is the author of *A Critique of Film Theory* and teaches at SUNY Buffalo. KAREN JAEHNE now lives in Washington, DC, but recently returned to Germany to work on a film being produced there. BRUCE KAWIN is the author of *Mindscreen* and teaches at Boulder. Through an editorial gaffe, his signature was left off his review of *The Funhouse* and *The Howling* in our last issue (we *did* get him into the contents listing!). MELANIE WALLACE is a *Cineaste* Associate and is finishing doctoral studies at CUNY.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Cynthia Deno, Journals Manager.

meanwhile, is that we become immediately involved in the story, partly because of the beauty of the performances and presentations, but also because of the immediacy of the medium. Yet, at the same time, we are bound to recall how all this started, that in effect we have been challenged to remember that this is a fiction. Why should the film-makers wish to do this? The penultimate scene seems to provide the answer.

The film's first ending appears to be a "happy" one. Sarah and Charles are shown together in a boat floating on a lovely, peaceful lake which contrasts vividly with the tempestuous sea which served as the symbolic backdrop of their first meeting and their subsequent affair. The second ending, however, casts everything into question again. It follows the traditional "wrap" party celebrating the completion of the film. Mike, by now, has become obsessed with Anna, or more precisely with the Anna who has been playing Sarah. Thus he tries to pursue her as she rather abruptly begins to leave the scene. Before he can catch up to her, she drives off, for what exact reason we are left to ponder. Mike, on the other hand, knows what he wants. He calls out "Sarah" as Anna leaves, and then the shot of the "happy" ending appears once more. What's the meaning of all this? In the case of Charles, it's at least apparent that acting has become life, that fiction has become fact, and that he has fallen into his romantic illusions. As for the audience, they are challenged by the final "happy" shot to decide whether they willingly identify with Charles's hopeless dream or not, and whether the fact that this has been a film within a film has made it more or less of a fiction, and whether perhaps life isn't actually a matter of inventing fictions for ourselves under critical conditions.

I have given the opinion that this film is bound to be a classic of its kind. This doesn't mean that I think it's perfect, of course. One could, for example, wish that the modern love story were filled out a bit more. Or one could wish for more of the ironic wit that was found in Fowles's novel. Yet in the fundamental way this film provides an example of how novels might be successfully brought to the screen. Reisz and Pinter were wise enough to see that to film a novel, one doesn't try to illustrate it.

The thing to do is to keep to its spirit, not necessarily its form. And the best way to do this is to find metaphorical equations. If the novel is already cinematic in nature, this may be a relatively simple thing. In the case of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, however, it required a radical reworking. Reisz and Pinter were bold enough to do this, and the result is one of the most impressive adaptations of a novel in recent memory and easily one of the best movies of the year. —GEORG GASTON

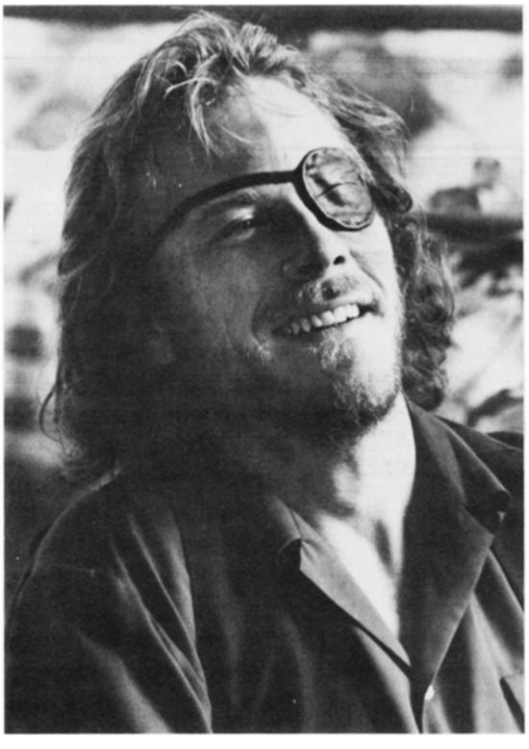
CUTTER'S WAY

Director: Ivan Passer. Producer: Paul R. Gurian. Script: Jeffrey Alan Fiskin, based on the novel Cutter Bone by Newton Thornburg. Music: Jack Nitzsche. Photography: Jordan Cronenweth. United Artists.

Ivan Passer's *Cutter's Way* is a profoundly disturbing film about friendship, morality and moral cowardice, truth and its shadows. The friends are Alexander Cutter, a one-eyed, one-legged, bitter ex-Vietnam veteran and Richard Bone, an Ivy League graduate incapable of committing himself to anything. *Cutter's Way's* complexity accounts for both its strengths and its weaknesses. Cutter and Bone are united by an obscure past, a love of or desire for Cutter's wife, Mo, and a murder and its revenge. The story revolves around notions of heroism as well as the realities of exploitation, both collective and individual, and it moves from the always obvious, crippling experience of Vietnam to the nature of power and wealth. It serves, at times, as an allegory for why we were in Vietnam, according to Cutter, and as an explanation as to why, exactly, certain people were on the front lines and others weren't; on the other hand, it serves, in the final analysis, as a lesson in the futility of individual action and personal revenge. All the while, *Cutter's Way* says some very disheartening things about the inability of the individual to change himself or his world, in spite of death's proximity or life's dearness, because all character is flawed, whether by greed or lust, fear or frustration, insensibility or sensitivity. Passer's attempt to work even-handedly with all of this material, to weave it into a coherent narrative frame, falls just short of its mark: some of the complexities are sacrificed to incoherency, and loose script ends dangle. But, in spite of its shortcomings, *Cutter's Way* is intriguing and arresting, and it not only adds a new dimension to our ideas of friendship—especially as seen in "buddy-buddy" films—but also to our understanding of individual morality.

Alex Cutter is loud, most often drunk, insulting, and plagued by a bitter vision of the world. The very opposite of the heartrending Jon Voight cripple of *Coming Home*, Cutter is a Vietnam vet whose life will never again approach "normality," and whose disability is the visible sign of his mutilation. He carries within himself a sense of moral righteousness as well as moral outrage; it was, after all, Cutter's heroism that earned him his blind eye and his bouts with phantom limb, and he falls back on his deformities as an excuse to be crude, abusive, and wild. Startlingly enough, he is also very funny; his caustic humor is winning, and John Heard's brilliant sense of timing and tempo, interpolating the fragile human with the inhuman horrible, successfully gives Cutter a personality that is much more complex than what originally meets the eye, and in the end allows him to believably act out his moral indignation to its futile end. Richard Bone, Cutter's best friend, suffers from neither moral outrage nor righteousness, but from a peculiar slavery to his body and its sexual yearnings, and a desire—for reasons unclear—to take

John Heard as Alex Cutter



The thing to do is to keep to its spirit, not necessarily its form. And the best way to do this is to find metaphorical equations. If the novel is already cinematic in nature, this may be a relatively simple thing. In the case of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, however, it required a radical reworking. Reisz and Pinter were bold enough to do this, and the result is one of the most impressive adaptations of a novel in recent memory and easily one of the best movies of the year. —GEORG GASTON

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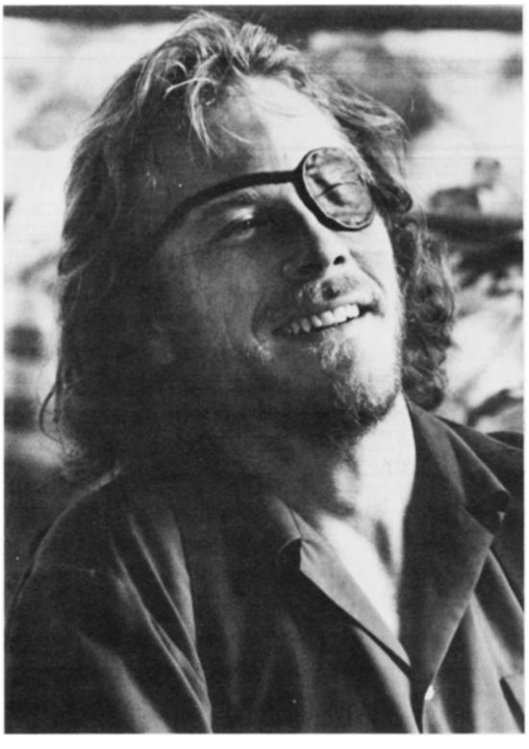
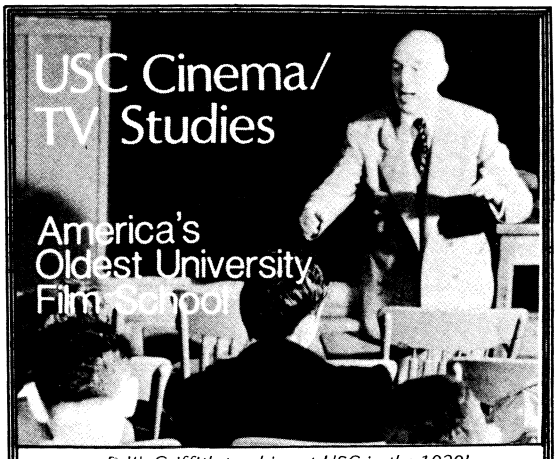


care of Cutter and his wife, Mo. He is as in love with Mo as he can be with anybody, but he is incapable of a selfless act—and Passer believes that love, like heroism, demands selflessness. Hero and anti-hero, Cutter and Bone are opposites, reflections of each other's inadequacies: Cutter's inspiration to moral action is countered by Bone's moral cowardice.

Cutter's Way begins with a parade sequence in black and white: dancers move toward the camera, and the closest of them—the central figure—is dressed in white. Their approach is in slow motion, to the rhythm of distorted sound; then, as the motion is increased and the dancers' movements lose their distortion, the black and white dissolves into color, and reality falls into "sync." The dancer in white twirls, comes closer, until finally it is her skirt that dominates the frame. Then, with a revolving motion, she moves from the camera's eye: her skirt wipes across the screen, and, following the wipe is a mansion. The visual presentation that led the viewer into a reality that is familiar—one in which color dominates, in which motion is "natural," or unimpeded—is immediately counterpointed with the static frame of the mansion. Reality, in other words, is full of elements not in "sync": it has an underside. The mansion is instantaneously cut, and, suddenly, it is evening in a hotel, where Richard Bone and, unknown to him, J. J. Cord are. This notion of an underside, of a dualism, structurally permeates the film: the movement is always from the exterior, the public (the parade scenes, barrooms, clubs, the polo grounds, and, finally, the cocktail party) to the private, the interior (hotel rooms, galleys, dens, bedrooms). The tension of the film works most successfully when these worlds collide, and they most obviously clash with Cutter's jerky movements—or those of the camera—as he heaves himself through them, pushing through the parade crowds, the polo field, the Cord cocktail party, and, finally, through a window—hauling at his heels his own underside, Bone, the man who, he accuses, is part of the reason the world lacks heroes. How out of kilter the world remains during Cutter's journey through it is manifested in the sometimes stylistically shocking composition and cinematogrphy, in the extreme low-angle shots of Cord's building and the guard dwarfed by his desk inside of it; the charred skeletal framework of Cutter's destroyed home, pitched crazily against the sky; the jolting motion of the horse beneath Cutter as he rides toward Cord's windows; and in the barriers of beams, windows, and curtains that constantly separate people from people.

Linking the personalities, motives, and dilemmas of the characters is the storyline of *Cutter's Way*. Richard Bone's car stalls in an alley on a rainy night, and he is almost run over by someone who has just deposited the



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Bone saves Cutter from the neighbors whose car he has drunkenly rammed.

brutally beaten body of a high school girl—unbeknownst to Bone—in a trashcan. Bone, after he is cleared by a police interrogation, recognizes the man in the alley while he and Cutter and Mo watch a parade in town, and Cutter identifies him as J. J. Cord, a man who owns a great deal of the town. He begins his own private investigation as to Cord's whereabouts the night the girl was killed, and finds that Cord's car was torched the same night as the body was deposited. While Bone withdraws his positive identification of Cord, Cutter pursues his sleuthing. He gets together with the sister of the dead girl, and proposes to Bone that they blackmail Cord. They write a letter to Cord from Bone, who signs it; then, when Bone only pretends to deliver the letter, it ends up in Cutter's hands and he, without Bone's knowledge, actually sees that the letter reaches Cord. (In one of the script's largest holes, it is never clear what the blackmail scheme is actually meant to lead to—either money or evidence—and after it folds, the dead girl's sister drops out of the film altogether.) Cutter does not come home the night he delivers Bone's signed letter to Cord, and Mo, after giving in to Bone's pleadings to go to bed with him, dies in a fire that destroys the house after Bone leaves that evening. Cutter, convinced the fire was deliberately set by Cord to kill Bone, sets out to destroy Cord. It is, in the final analysis, his war—and he will fight it his way.

Cutter's obsession with Cord moves from the political to the personal: the dividing line is Mo's death. When Bone, after refusing to commit himself to an unequivocal identification of Cord, asks Cutter why he is so intent on nabbing Cord, Cutter responds that it's because people like Cord—protected by wealth—"never had their asses on the line" in Vietnam. Cutter's "way" is to have Cord, and his world, on the front lines in spite of money and power—to be, in other words, held accountable, and not only for the death of the girl. Mo's death moves Cutter beyond a political quest; it is personal vengeance that inspires Cutter's final obsession, and, while it remains obvious that the fight against Cord is a battle with wealth, it is conducted on a field rimmed with personal banners.

Richard Bone is everything Cutter is not: whole, untouched by a war he obviously successfully avoided, unscarred by life, a "ladies'" man: he sails, stays with Mo when Cutter gets drunk, and rounds Cutter up whenever he disappears. Bone's emergence as a moral

coward begins with his inability—and unwillingness—to sustain any personal integrity, except in his loyalty to Cutter, and even that, in the end, is suspect. His interest in taking care of Mo is more selfish than selfless; he manipulates her loneliness in order to assuage his ego, and betrays not only Cutter in his seduction of Mo, but Mo as well, for he leaves her to her death. Mo, the voice of rationality, of moderation, throughout the story, originally says of Bone that she can't stand him when she is "straight"; when Bone continues to hammer away at their friendship, she tiredly, and correctly, accuses him of having nothing on his mind but sex—an observation as startlingly truthful as it is painfully clear. Bone's shallowness is merely cloaked in desire, his ego wrapped in reticence. He is, for the most part, terrified, but his very spinelessness works against his better judgment, and he allows himself to be dragged by Cutter, against his will, into a confrontation with forces he would much rather avoid. Whereas Mo's death leaves Bone to think that she committed suicide after he left her that night, it convinces Cutter that Cord had the house burned, and he faces the entire situation soberly. I take my tragedy straight, he tells the world: it's the everyday drudgery and the mundane I can't stand. Cutter stops drinking; his life changes; his obsession with Cord's death grows; but Bone, benumbed, emotionally frozen, remains the same.

Cutter's final plan is to accost Cord on his own ground, in his home, a confrontation of the lone individual against the individual surrounded by family and friends and bodyguards —a siege. In a pivotal scene before Cutter has his "way," Cutter walks across a polo field in lone opposition to the motion of play, watched by Cord and ignored by the players. His crippledness and frailty never more obvious except when he undresses for bed, Cutter stands apart, handicapped in a world that he cannot survive, a world in which there is no room for heroes, in which heroic action itself is thwarted. Indeed, when Cutter does manage to get into one of Cord's lawn parties, he ends his final charge toward moral retribution—and Cord—on horseback, a knight-errant with a cowboy's revolver in hand, the synthesis of the heroic—and the futile. While Bone, having been caught as in intruder at Cord's party by Cord's wife and bodyguards, is claiming to be Alexander Richard and is being confronted by Cord,

whose rationality seems to appeal to his natural cowardice, Cutter begins his last stampede through the twentieth century, past the swimming pool and the hors d'oeuvres, women in silk and men in suits, and up the stairs of Cord's mansion. When he crashes through Cord's window from horseback, revolver in hand, he slashes his own throat, dying with a gurgle from his lips, still holding the gun. In an anticlimactic motion, Richard Bone kneels beside Cutter, and, realizing that Cutter is dying, shifts his focus to Cord. You're the killer, Bone accuses; Cord replies, "What if I were?" Bone's reaction is to pick up Cutter's hand that still clutches the gun. Pointing it at Cord, he presses Cutter's finger to pull the trigger in his final—and ultimate—act of cowardice.

Cutter's Way's disconcerting ending is a brilliant triumph of intentional ambiguity that underscores Cutter's singularity of purpose, his obsessive, lonely confrontation with the universe—a theme not unfamiliar to either the Czech cinema or Passer. The fact of the matter is, it is Cutter's insistence that Cord "is responsible for everything" that leads Cutter into opposition with a world in which Cord's specific criminality is never proven—all evidence is wrenched out of Cutter's obsession and is, in the final analysis, circumstantial—but that, exactly, is the point. Cord's guilt does not have to be proven, because Cord is guilty nonetheless. His final, insulting, "What if I were?" hurled at Bone is evidence that Cord knows his money and power will protect him, no matter what he does or does not do, and, after all, Cutter is dead. When Bone picks up Cutter's hand, and not his gun alone, he is being true to his own character rather than to Cutter's heroism, for, in the final analysis, Cutter's heroism was futile—both in Vietnam and at Cord's mansion. There is no sense of relief when Cord is shot; Cutter can't possibly know he has been vindicated; Bone does not act independently. Cord's death does not mean that the world—and those who "get fucked," according to Cutter—will be any different whatsoever. It is Bone who is the survivor, a bitter twist in a moral tale of a world turned anti-heroic. —MELANIE WALLACE

Some divorces make great entertainment.

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Stanley Cavell

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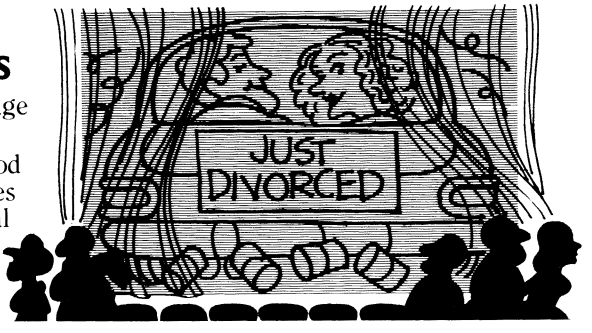

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MY DINNER WITH ANDRÉ

Director: Louis Malle. Screenplay: André Gregory and Wally Shawn. New Yorker Films.

The setting is an elegant Manhattan restaurant in 1980. Two old friends, playwright Wally Shawn and director André Gregory, meet for dinner and talk for several hours. There are no flashbacks, no cutaways, no illustrations of the by turns fascinating and mundane stories the men tell; the film is composed almost entirely of two-shots and close-ups. There is no melodramatic climax, no violence, no sex, no car chase, no obvious resolution of conflict. Yet there is nothing boring or pretentious about this literate and engaging film. It has the respect for real life and real time which Zavattini endorsed but rarely executed, and where it goes beyond Rohmer's *My Night at Maud's* is in its confronting of adult questions without resorting in difficult moments to the easy grace of an ironic pose. *My Dinner with André* is the most interesting and intelligent film since *Mon Oncle d'Amérique;* it ranks with *Murmur of the Heart, India,* and *Atlantic City* as the best of Louis Malle's work; it deserves the Oscar, hands down, for the best screenplay of the year; and it is in its own way as definitive a statement of the possibilities of realism in the narrative film as *Caligari* was of Expressionism. In a nutshell, it is the kind of film you wish all your best friends could see, a film you want to talk about for hours, preferably over a good dinner, for it is a film that not only records but also stimulates good conversation.

The essence of Malle's achievement here is that he stays out of the way. One is aware, to be sure, of the limited number of set-ups, but these are sufficiently varied that the cinematic space feels intimate rather than claustrophobic. Although *My Dinner with André* is carried, as it was conceived, by Wally and André—who distilled their script from many hours of taped conversations—it is Malle who must be credited with sustaining the theatrical and spatial integrity that (as Bazin paradoxically argued in "Theater and Cinema, II") makes this film so intriguingly cinematic. When the camera is not simply holding on the actors, the framing may shift to include the mirror behind their table—to comment subtly on the reflexive implications of a particular story—or to the waiters for comic relief. The rhythm of the film is structured by the rhythms of the conversation and the dinner. At one point André refers to a moment when *Moby-Dick* slows down as if at a lull in the wind, and the film's rhythm rests while the waiter brings on the next course. At another point André and Wally agree on the importance of telling people the truth about personal feelings; a waiter asks whether everything is all right, and

they snap into their social roles to tell him everything is fine. These pull-backs create a space for the conversation to deepen and to achieve its relevance.

Most of the talking is done by André, who has spent the previous two years confronting the meaning of his life and art while Wally has been trying to make money as a writer in the New York theater scene. André talks about his friendship with Grotowski, a visit to Findhorn, his experiences with psychic phenomena, synchronicity (coincidences that do not seem coincidental), experiments in ritual and community theater, death, and the possibility of a Golden Age in which groups like that at Findhorn—"pockets of Light"—will hold and uplift the better energies of mankind. Behind his bright eyes, his gentle voice, his enthusiasm, is an almost suicidal depression, a drivenness advancing on a sense of being professionally rootless and cornered. Beyond all this, André is in the difficult position of telling a friend about convictions and experiences that may sound crazy. Wally tries to keep up, to "make conversation," answering an early monologue, for instance, with a nervous laugh and a reference to a story about people being strangled on a submarine—but eventually he answers André in kind, saying that he has trouble understanding these mystical preoccupations when his major satisfactions in life include not finding a cockroach in the coffee he has left out overnight in his apartment. It is when Wally responds that the movie finds its balance and its twofold point.

The first point, suggested above, is that the legacy of the seventies has been to encode the essence of this conversation in most of our heads, that Wally and André represent the poles of our most urgent concern: to establish a relationship with the deep energies of the self that will be both spiritually satisfying and economically viable. It is not clear to most of us whether urban culture is killing itself, nor whether Findhorn or even Ecotopia is the proper lifeboat; it is not clear whether André's narcissism is escapist or profoundly on target, nor whether Wally's pragmatic careerism is characterized by an uplifting acceptance of life or boxed in by stress and doomed. What is clear is that these questions are adequately and articulately confronted in an atmosphere of integrity, humor, and graceful intimacy. Nothing is glossed over or hammered in; the dialectic is real, the dialogue provocative, the aspiration dynamic.

The second point has to do with the nature of theater, and it comes close to answering the problems raised by the first. A great deal of their talk concerns the relation between art and life, between the staged and the unstaged. What is the role of ritual in theater? What would happen if an actor played himself, and what then would be the nature of "role"? How can art address and mirror the actual conditions of life? Integrating his spiritual preoccupations with his experiments in theater, André observes that all of us are shadows, images—and at that point the movie screen announces itself as the back wall of Plato's cave (the *Republic* too is a reflexive dialogue), and we notice that Wally and André are playing themselves as roles in a film that addresses its audience and itself as both artifice and companion: a realistic yet highly crafted reflection of actual experience, whose perfect structure is the evidence of its staging yet whose commitment to the conditions of the apparently "uncinematic" event of talking over dinner is the evidence of its celebration of the unstaged.

The tyranny of the "cinematic" (in the reduced sense of doing only what only film can do: spectacles, cutaways, documentation, visualizations of mental and emotional states, etc.) has cut film off from the fascinations of the mundane and of language, from the resources of sitting around a fire—even if that be the arc-light of a projector—and telling a good story. *My Dinner with André* not only contains many wonderful and well-told stories but also vindicates and revitalizes the conditions of their telling; it is not far removed from the excitement and sense of original energy that characterized ancient and medieval sagas and story-clusters (exactly the sense missing from Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, for example, where the stories are visualized in a way that calls attention to the director and loses the interplay of the tellers). What it attempts to restore to cinema is the energy of community and the satisfactions of ritual, as it invites the audience into the firelit cave to break bread and to investigate and redefine what characterizes, bonds, and challenges us. This aspiration operates at the level of the image, the situation; it is not emphasized in the script, but is what the film shows it means. What turns out to be most authentically cinematic about this film, then, is the fact that it simply shows two men having dinner. —BRUCE KAWIN

Controversy & Correspondence

CORRECTION

This has reference to my article on NEW DIRECTIONS IN INDIAN CINEMA published in your Fall 1980 issue which mentions Mr. M.G. Ramachandran's acting in a few films during his tenure as the chief Minister of Tamil Nadu so as to supplement his earnings to meet tax dues.

This was based on reports appearing in many newspapers and magazines published in India.

It has been brought to my notice that the reference to Mr. Ramachandran obtaining the permission of the legislature and acting in films dressed in red and black are not accurate. I regret the inaccuracy and would request you to publish this letter in the next issue of your journal.

—CHIDANANDA DAS GUPTA

SCHOLARLY CLARIFICATIONS

I read with interest Bruce Kawin's review of my book *Hemingway and Film* in the Summer 1981 *Film Quarterly*. In order to be brief, I would like to single out two remarks in the review for comment. First, I am amazed that Mr. Kawin takes to task the Ungar Film Series on literature and film, in which my book appeared, for having a narrow and restrictive format, since he has himself contributed to the same series. In that case, what are we to think of his book on *Faulkner and Film?*

Secondly, I acknowledged my gratitude and respect for his essay on the film version of *To Have and Have Not*, which was very helpful to me, by referring to it in my "Acknowledgments," in the text of my book, and in the bibliography as well. For him to indicate in his review that I profited from his research seems self-aggrandizing in a way that borders on the unprofessional. Hopefully, in a community of scholars we all profit from each other's work. —REV. GENE D. PHILLIPS, S.J.

Bruce Kawin replies:

I regret any "self-aggrandizing" connotations in my remark on Phillips's research, and intended none. What I said was that he "includes a good deal of material that eluded Laurence," including mine. I was impressed that Phillips took the trouble to obtain my essay before it was published, and am grateful for his scrupulous acknowledgments.

Because I did not want to bring in my own work where it was not relevant, I did not mention *Faulkner and Film*. I do, however, stand by what I said about the Ungar "*X and Film*" series. In both *Faulkner and Film* and *Hemingway and Film* there is far too much space devoted to very bad adaptations. The tone and focus of Phillips's book sug-

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Secondly, I acknowledged my gratitude and respect for his essay on the film version of *To Have and Have Not*, which was very helpful to me, by referring to it in my "Acknowledgments," in the text of my book, and in the bibliography as well. For him to indicate in his review that I profited from his research seems self-aggrandizing in a way that borders on the unprofessional. Hopefully, in a community of scholars we all profit from each other's work. —REV. GENE D. PHILLIPS, S.J.

Bruce Kawin replies:

I regret any "self-aggrandizing" connotations in my remark on Phillips's research, and intended none. What I said was that he "includes a good deal of material that eluded Laurence," including mine. I was impressed that Phillips took the trouble to obtain my essay before it was published, and am grateful for his scrupulous acknowledgments.

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The second point has to do with the nature of theater, and it comes close to answering the problems raised by the first. A great deal of their talk concerns the relation between art and life, between the staged and the unstaged. What is the role of ritual in theater? What would happen if an actor played himself, and what then would be the nature of "role"? How can art address and mirror the actual conditions of life? Integrating his spiritual preoccupations with his experiments in theater, André observes that all of us are shadows, images—and at that point the movie screen announces itself as the back wall of Plato's cave (the *Republic* too is a reflexive dialogue), and we notice that Wally and André are playing themselves as roles in a film that addresses its audience and itself as both artifice and companion: a realistic yet highly crafted reflection of actual experience, whose perfect structure is the evidence of its staging yet whose commitment to the conditions of the apparently "uncinematic" event of talking over dinner is the evidence of its celebration of the unstaged.

The tyranny of the "cinematic" (in the reduced sense of doing only what only film can do: spectacles, cutaways, documentation, visualizations of mental and emotional states, etc.) has cut film off from the fascinations of the mundane and of language, from the resources of sitting around a fire—even if that be the arc-light of a projector—and telling a good story. *My Dinner with André* not only contains many wonderful and well-told stories but also vindicates and revitalizes the conditions of their telling; it is not far removed from the excitement and sense of original energy that characterized ancient and medieval sagas and story-clusters (exactly the sense missing from Pasolini's *Arabian Nights*, for example, where the stories are visualized in a way that calls attention to the director and loses the interplay of the tellers). What it attempts to restore to cinema is the energy of community and the satisfactions of ritual, as it invites the audience into the firelit cave to break bread and to investigate and redefine what characterizes, bonds, and challenges us. This aspiration operates at the level of the image, the situation; it is not emphasized in the script, but is what the film shows it means. What turns out to be most authentically cinematic about this film, then, is the fact that it simply shows two men having dinner. —BRUCE KAWIN

Controversy & Correspondence

CORRECTION

This has reference to my article on NEW DIRECTIONS IN INDIAN CINEMA published in your Fall 1980 issue which mentions Mr. M.G. Ramachandran's acting in a few films during his tenure as the chief Minister of Tamil Nadu so as to supplement his earnings to meet tax dues.

This was based on reports appearing in many newspapers and magazines published in India.

It has been brought to my notice that the reference to Mr. Ramachandran obtaining the permission of the legislature and acting in films dressed in red and black are not accurate. I regret the inaccuracy and would request you to publish this letter in the next issue of your journal.

—CHIDANANDA DAS GUPTA

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gested (perhaps inaccurately) that he came under editorial pressures similar to those I encountered. My own solution was to include extra chapters on the cinematic aspects of Faulkner's fiction, his influence on film-makers, and his own Hollywood scripts; these, and the filmography, were the source of some friction between me and the editors. The compromise was to include but shorten those sections, and ironically, every negative review of the book has accused me of rushing through what clearly ought to have been the main subject of the book, Faulkner's screenplays. For my part, I tried to take Phillips off the hook and discuss the problems of the editor's approach.

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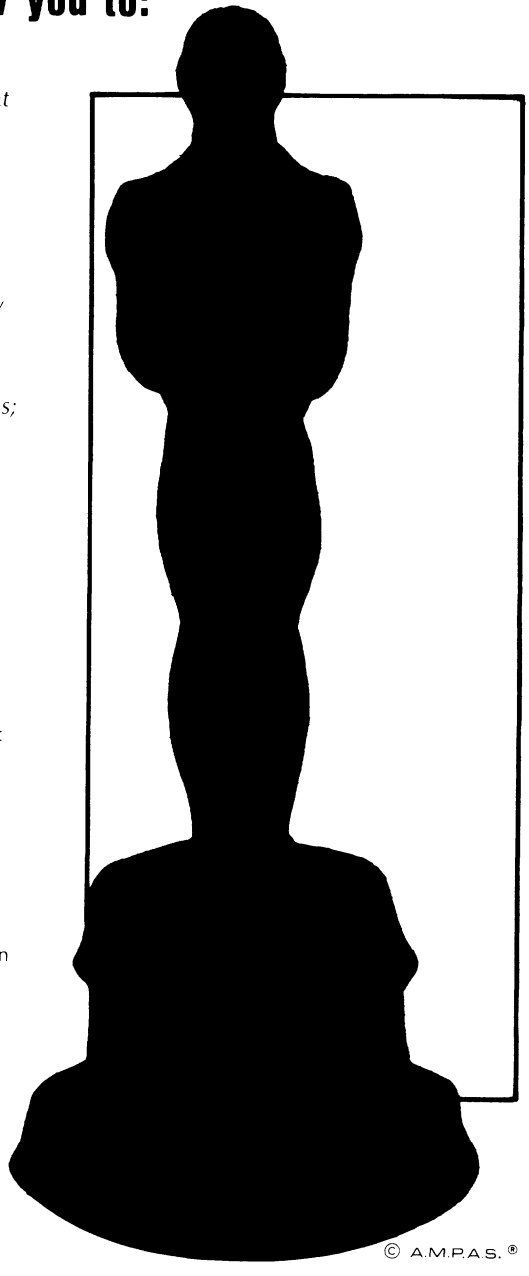

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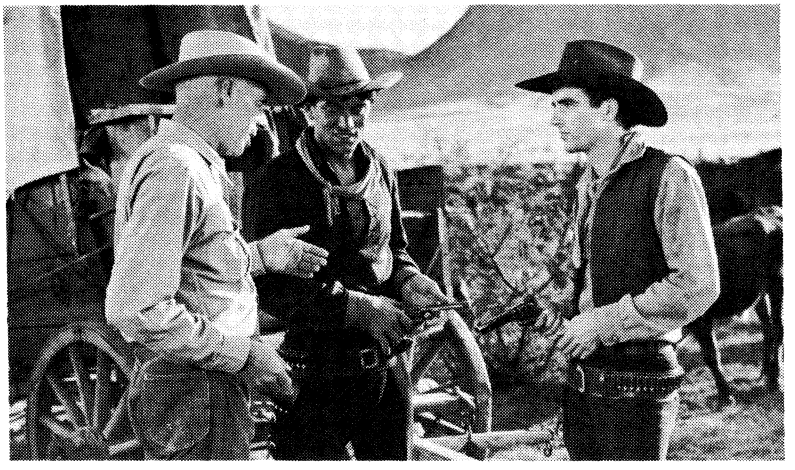

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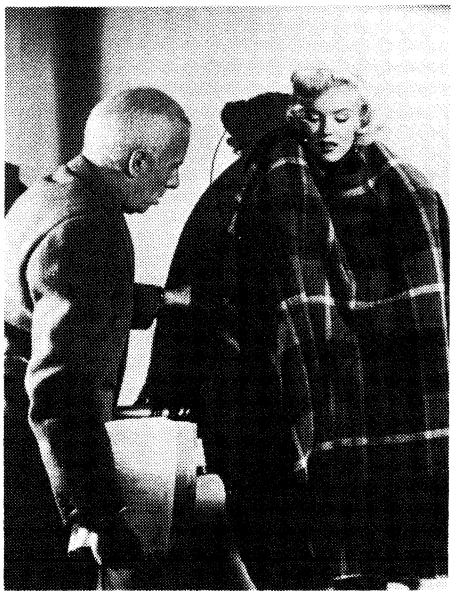

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